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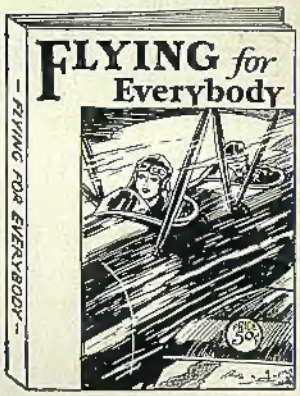

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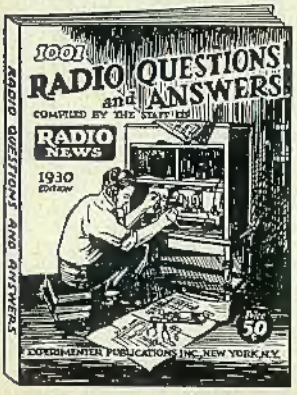
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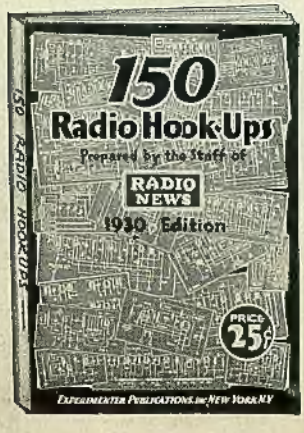

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AMAZING STORIES
Quarterly

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Our Cover

this month represents a scene from the story entitled, "The Other Side of the Moon," by Edmond Hamilton, in which the scientist is shown on the moon, just after he has sent the ray up, and while he is attempting—despite the efforts of the turtle-men—to reverse the switch in order to enable his friends to return in the tube to the earth.

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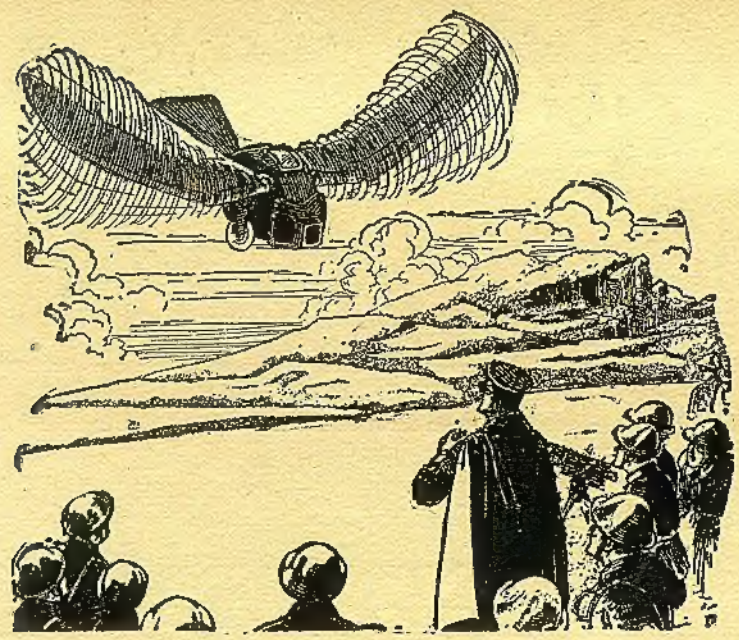

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FALL, 1929

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Quarterly

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Editorial and General Offices: 381 Fourth Avenue, New York City

The Younger Generation and Future Science

By Joe Abrams

SCIENCE MUST ADVANCE!

THAT is the password for the progress of civilization. Much work has been done, but there is a great deal more still to be done. We must have men to carry on that work which the medieval scientist so valiantly began, and which our modern scientists have continued under circumstances hardly more favorable. There is still unbelief, there is still skepticism, unfounded criticism, narrow-minded reproach, and violent verbal attacks upon the plausibility and even possibility of all those things which science has discovered. Each new prophecy unusually in advance of that which has been definitely proved, is met with derision, even from experts—or perhaps, especially from experts—in the fields most closely related to the new idea.

But there is another problem. Where shall we look for men to fill the place left by the departing scientists and inventors who have devoted the best part of their lives to their work? There is only one solution—the younger generation.

The younger generation must be influenced to follow the path of science and invention. But how make them learn at an early age that they have predilections toward science, and thus save from wasting energy and talents in the years that might otherwise be spent in fitting them for lawyers or doctors or the numerous other professions and vocations? As a member of the younger generation, I shall attempt to discuss this subject to the best of my ability.

How may this younger generation be recruited into the ranks of scientists? To me there suggests itself one excellent method—namely, through "scientifiction." Who is attracted by the cold stare of dry figures? Can the child feel any interest by merely looking at rocks or fossils or bones? Hardly. Can youth realize the romance in chemistry or metallurgy by merely looking at steel and iron? And astronomy. Does the calculation of the distances between the stars and planets, their characteristics, what they are composed of—do any of these things bring in the adventure and play of imagination that the youth of the world craves?

Let us consider by what means this younger generation may be induced to take up the sciences as a life-work. Scientifiction gives us an inkling of what may await us in the future, explains the work of the various departments included in the study of science and goads us on toward deeper study and therefore greater progress and often furnishes new ideas—often startlingly new ideas.

It is a magnet that draws the real student to a desire to know more about everything. It means advance! It is a means whereby civilization may continue her march toward her ultimate goal — unparalleled wisdom.

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(*See page 572*)

The Next Issue of the Quarterly Will Be on the Newsstands January 20th

The BRIDGE

MR. VERRILL says—and we must agree with him—that to be a good ethnologist, one must also be well versed in geology, zoology, physics, archeology—in fact in all the sciences. Mr. Verrill is not only an ethnologist of note, he is also a writer of wide reputation. It is hardly any wonder, therefore, that he should be one of the favorite authors of AMAZING STORIES *readers. In "The Bridge of Light" the author builds a story based on the various folklore that he has heard during his numerous expeditions through the wildernesses and ruins of old*

¶ With a contemptuous toss of her head she stepped forward—stepped over the verge of that terrible chasm!

# of LIGHT

Mayan tradition, each of which probably has some basis of fact. Many astounding stories of prehistoric times might well be uncovered when some of the engraved hieroglyphics which have been found are deciphered. It is not impossible that the ancient Indians had made astounding discoveries in the use of some minerals of which we have just recently become cognizant. How else can some of the remarkable relics which are unearthed from time to time be explained?

Perhaps when flying becomes a more common mode of travel, there will be more scientists venturing into the wilds of unexplored countries, because then a good many of the hardships and inevitable risks of going through jungles and dangerous country will be eliminated. We may well look forward to amazing finds in the near future—some inklings of which we are given here. We know you will agree with us after you have read it, that "The Bridge of Light" is one of Mr. Verrill's best.

By

A. Hyatt Verrill

Author of: "Through the Crater's Rim," "Death from the Skies," etc.

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CHAPTER I

A Strange Find

LOOKING back upon it now I can scarcely believe it ever happened, and find it difficult to convince myself that I actually passed through such amazing and almost incredible experiences. Yet I have but to look at my left arm and see the scars that cover it in order to bring it all vividly back. And there is the tattooed symbol upon my chest. And if I needed further confirmation of the actuality of it all, there is Itza. Surely she is very real, and should occasion arise she could confirm the greater portion of the story. Even as I am writing, I have but to glance up from my table to see her, seated in the hammock swung on the porch, her dark head bent over some delicate bit of handiwork, her rounded cheek and the curve of her neck glowing like old gold in the diffused light—even in her conventional surroundings—as exotic as an orchid flower. But I find I am digressing—as I invariably do when I see or think of Itza.

It all began in a most ordinary way at Vigo. I was returning to England from an expedition to South America, and as my ship was to remain several hours at Vigo, I decided to stretch my sea-weary legs by a stroll through the quaint Spanish port and, incidentally, have a look at some of the second-hand shops where, on more than one occasion, I had picked up some very interesting old books and other curios.

Crossing the quay, and with a few sharp words in their own tongue quickly silencing the importunities of the piratical-looking boatmen, the bandit-like taxi drivers, the loathsome beggars and the swarm of would-be guides, I ascended the steep Calle San Sebastian, reached the Avenida Principal with its rush of traffic, its swarms of fashionably-attired women and men, its smart shops and its honking automobiles, and turning to the right, entered a narrow, dark alley. A moment later I passed under a mediæval archway and found myself in the Plazuela de Tres Santos. Within five hundred feet of where I stood was the hustling, noisy, modern avenue, but it might have been five hundred miles distant. When I passed under the old arch, I stepped into old Spain. About the tiny flagged plaza, scarcely larger than a courtyard, were ancient, sagging, time-aged houses with outjutting balconies, iron-grilled windows and shady, mysterious patios. Olive-skinned señoritas lounged on the balcony rails gazing half-curiously, half-coquettishly at the stranger who had entered the plazuela; older women in their bright rebosas and flaring, gaudy skirts sat on stools outside their doorways, stringing onions, weaving on crude hand-looms or gossiping with their neighbors; swarthy, fiercely-mustached men besashed, and wearing berets, lounged about or played idly upon guitars; and everywhere swarmed children as happy, as dirty and nearly as naked as the pigs and puppies that were equally as numerous.

But all this was an old story to me. Scarcely glancing to left or right, I picked my way across the court to where a once gorgeous signboard informed all who were interested that one, Miguel José Salceda, was the proprietor of the ramshackle shop wherein were to be found antiques, second-hand articles, books, native handiwork, cigars, tobacco and onions—a strange assortment truly, but quite the usual thing in the confines of the plazuela. The shop itself was a mere cubby hole in the massive stone wall of what had once been a monastery, but Miguel José had the entire plazuela at his disposal, and he had taken possession of several square yards of it. On boxes, tables and upon the stone flagging the overflow of his stock was spread and piled—looking for all the world as though the shop had spilled itself into the square—and, seated in the midst of the

aggregation of everything imaginable in the shape of junk and odds and ends, was the *don* himself. Propped against the wall in the sunshine, his touseled gray head sagging forward on his bare hairy chest, his hands clasped across his paunch, Señor Salceda was enjoying his afternoon siesta—as his raucous snores testified to all the world.

Having no need to disturb his slumbers, I moved about among his wares, examining the litter of battered and dust-covered books upon a rough deal table. Presently, Salceda raised his head, yawned prodigiously, stretched himself and, slowly and reluctantly opening his single eye, caught sight of me.

Instantly, and with surprising agility for a man of his build, he sprang to his feet and hurried forward, grinning until his leathery, unshaven cheeks resembled a relief-map of his native Pyrennes, and exposing two yellow tusks in his otherwise toothless gums.

"Gracias a Dios, 'tis the Señor Ingles again!" he cried, patting me on the back, embracing me in Spanish fashion and exuding an almost overpowering odor of garlic. "And how is the illustrious Señor, and his dear Mamá and his most lovely Señora, and his four—no, I mistake, it is five—niñitos?"

"No, Don Miguel," I replied with a laugh, "it is not the English Señor but the Americano, and unfortunately, as I have neither mother, wife nor children—either four or five—I cannot tell you how they may fare. Personally, amigo, I am in excellent health. And how is Don Miguel and his family?"

THE old fellow grinned wider than ever. "Si, I remember," he muttered as he rolled a cigarette. "But of what importance, Señor, whether Americano or Ingles? They are the same species; all are rich, all are fond of old books, and all will have their little joke. And as for the others—Valgame Dios—if you have no mother now, you had one once—may her soul rest in peace; and such a simpatico Señor should have a lovely Señora and the four—nay five—little ones. *Bien pues!* What would you? But of a truth I am overcome with joy and happiness to find your highness well. Permit me, Señor, to offer you a sip of wine."

To refuse would be to jeopardize friendship and the chance of a good bargain, and as I had by now selected two rare old volumes that I greatly wanted, a good bargain was desirable. Besides, Salceda always had most excellent wine.

Good fellowship having been thus established, I asked the old fellow the price of the two books. One was a scarce edition of "Don Quixote," the other a copy of a quaint work on the Antilles, and both were battered, stained, their covers torn and warped, but in good condition within. Salceda, I knew, had no knowledge of the true value of his stock, but priced articles in accordance with the status of the purchaser and his desire to acquire them. So, scarcely looking at the two volumes, he glanced appraisingly at my face and informed me that they were worth twenty pesetas.

"Not to me," I assured him, tossing the books upon the table. As I did so, one of the books slipped to the pavement, and as Miguel stooped to recover it, a piece of folded, stained and frayed paper dropped from between the leaves.

"Bueno, then, how much will your excellency pay?" he asked, as he glanced at the paper in his hand and replaced the book.

"Ten pesetas, no more," I declared.

"It is nothing, nothing for such fine old books," he exclaimed, "but the Señor Ingles—or is it Americano—knows what he can pay. So ten pesetas it is, your excellency." As I counted out the money, Salceda half-unfolded the piece of paper he still held, and then, evidently deciding it worthless, turned as if to toss it into a pile of rubbish. But something about the thing had attracted me. I had caught a glimpse of figures, of dull red, blue and green upon it, and, thinking it might be an old map, I stayed his hand.

"Hold on," I exclaimed. "That belongs to the book."

"No, Señor, I think not, "he said, as he squinted at it with his one good eye, "but perhaps a map, or some old picture left in the book by mistake. Of no value, your excellency; but the illustrious Americano—or is it Ingles—cares for old things, and this is very old. Si," as he again focused his bulging eye upon it and cocked his head on one side. "Si, of a truth, I should say it is antediluvian!" He chuckled at his own humor. "So," he continued, "if the Señor desires it—well, perhaps a peso or two."

He was a sharp old Gallego—none sharper—and the bit of stained and colored paper that a moment before had been condemned to the rubbish pile had suddenly acquired a value. Not much to be sure, but better than nothing by a long shot. Very possibly, I thought, it really belonged with the rubbish. But I was curious to learn what it was and, handing Don Miguel two pesos in addition to the price of the books, I slipped the paper into one of the volumes and departed with his fervent, "May you go with God, Señor," in my ears. Little did I dream, as I made my way back to the ship, what a strange investment I had made or through what amazing experiences and remarkable places that ragged, folded paper would lead me.

Indeed, at the time, I gave it so little thought that I completely forgot about it, until we were well at sea, when, in my cabin after dinner, I opened the, "Explorations, Discoveries, Strange Sights and Remarkable Adventures in the Indies, etc," by imaginative old Sebastian Gomez, and once more came upon my two-peso purchase. Unfolding it carefully, for it was creased and old, I actually gasped, staring incredulously at what I had revealed. My first glance at the fresher, cleaner inner surface of the sheet was enough. It was a codex—one of those strange pictographic records kept by the ancient Aztecs and Mayas! Less than a dozen originals, I knew, were in existence. Could this be an original? Could it be one of the lost Codices? If so it was priceless, irreplaceable, and with trembling fingers, almost reverently, I examined it and studied the texture of the material through my lens. The material was unquestionably ancient papyrus! The color, the technique of the green, red, blue and yellow figures proved it no copy! The old Spaniard had spoken more truly than he had imagined when he had jokingly called it "antediluvian."

Incredulously I studied the codex that, by sheerest good fortune, had come into my possession. I puzzled my brain to decipher or decode it, to recognize the figures of conventionalized human beings, of gods and other objects. I was familiar with Aztec pictographs, familiar with Mayan glyphs, but somehow this did not appear like either. And yet, of the two it was far more Mayan than Aztec. A hope rose in my breast, a hope that I had stumbled upon one of the long-lost, missing codices of the Mayas. Only three Mayan codices were known, yet there must have been hundreds, and in all probability many had been taken back to Spain as curios by the returning conquerors. Was it therefore beyond the bounds of possibility—even of probability—that some of these might still be preserved, their value unknown to their owners, perhaps regarded as worthless scraps of old maps, and that one of these should have been tucked between the pages of the ancient volume I had bought?

The more I thought of it the more reasonable it seemed. And if the bit of papyrus should prove to be a

missing record of the Mayas, then I had stumbled on a bit of luck. Not only would it be of inestimable scientific interest, but it would possess a very tangible value in pounds sterling or dollars and cents. That, to me, I must confess, was a very important factor. Scientists must live and, like most scientists—more especially those devoted to ethnology and archeology—I was not overburdened with worldly goods. My last expedition had drained my resources, and even when I had disposed of my collections—a slow and uncertain procedure—I would be little better off than when I had started. But if the ancient scrap of paper before me actually proved to be a Mayan codex, I need have little worry over my future. I chuckled to myself as my thoughts dwelt on this possibility. How strange are the whims of Fate. Here I had devoted years to explorations in far-off lands, had undergone hardships, had had my share of sufferings, had risked health and life a thousand times, and (if my hopes proved true) had made a greater find in a second-hand shop in Vigo, Spain, than in all my wanderings.

I BROUGHT myself back to earth with an effort. I was building castles in the air with no tangible basis to work on. The thing might be comparatively worthless, a copy or perhaps even a codex made subsequent to the Spanish conquest. Until I could have its origin, its age and its value established by experts, I would dismiss it from my mind.

My first act, when I had reached London and had established myself in my apartment in Eardly Crescent, was to visit the British Museum with my find. For once my old friend, Dr. Joyce, lost his habitual nonchalance as he examined the codex. He uttered an ejaculation of amazement, his eyes sparkled, and he became obviously excited.

"Extraordinary!" he exclaimed. "What a jolly find! Of course I cannot be positive of its identity on such a superficial examination," he continued, "but it is unquestionably a codex, and I should surmise of Mayan origin. The cartouches and date symbols are assuredly Mayan, but there are other details, other features that excite doubt. But of course we know so little about Mayan codices. And it seems to bear certain Nahua characteristics. Possibly it is a codex of one of the independent Mayan states that came under Nahua influence. But we should be able to ascertain its age—these date symbols are very clear."

He studied it closely. "Ah, here it is!" he cried jubilantly. "If I am not greatly mistaken this glyph reads 8 Ahau 12—no 13, or is it? Well, either 12 or 13. The unit symbols are difficult because they are so highly decorated and involved. But 8 Ahau and either 12 or 13 Ceh in the Calendar-round. There appears to be an Initial Series date also. However, the Calendar-round will place it approximately. Let me see, that would be about 90-94 B. C."

I gasped. The codex, if my friend was right, and Dr. Joyce is perhaps the greatest living authority on the subject—was more than two thousand years old! But to my disappointment Dr. Joyce could make little more of the ancient document than I could. And before I could realize on it, before it had any real scientific or monetary value, I would be compelled to find someone who could establish its origin, its identity and its relationship. At Dr. Joyce's suggestion I next visited Oxford and called on Professor McLeod, who, as everyone knows, has made a life study of ancient American glyphs and symbols. But this visit gave no more definite results than before.

Following this I made the rounds of nearly all the archeologists and students of pre-Columbian American art and writings in Great Britain, but without result. All agreed that my discovery was a codex, all agreed that it bore the earmarks of Mayan origin, all agreed on the date symbols, and all agreed that it was so at variance with all the previously known Mayan and Aztec codices that it was an insoluble puzzle to them. They all agreed, also, that if its origin could be established, it would be the most valuable codex in existence, and readily saleable for many thousands of pounds.

Possibly, in the United States, they suggested, I might be able to succeed where I had failed in England and, very sensibly, added Dr. Joyce, as it would unquestionably be eventually purchased in America, why not submit it to the American experts?

But when I reached the country of my birth and called on various archeologists, I found that they could give me little more information than I had obtained from the British scientists. The American Museum in New York, the Museum of the American Indian, the Peabody Museum of Cambridge, the Pennsylvania State Museum and scores of others were visited in turn. But neither Dr. Whistler, Professor Saville, Dr. Spinden, Dr. Gregory, Dr. Mason nor any other of the scores of authorities on the subject dared express a definite opinion. The codex was genuine, it was remarkable, it was priceless, and its date was established. But whether it was entirely Mayan, whether it was Aztec with Mayan addenda or vice versa, or whether it was the work of some undetermined independent state of Mexico or Central America, no one could state. It was, in fact, the greatest puzzle that had confronted the world's most prominent archeologists in many years.

But I *did* secure some information. Dr. Whistler of the American Museum established the fact that the codex recorded some very important historical event and a migration. Professor Saville of the Heye Museum was positive it recorded a myth or a prophecy and identified the symbol of Kukulcan, the Mayan hero-god or "plumed serpent" as the dominating figure, and Professor Henderson discovered and partially deciphered symbols indicating that the codex embodied the features of a map and gave a description of some location. Several also suggested that it might prove to be a copy of a more ancient codex, or possibly an abbreviated or condensed form of several, or that it might be a codex index or key referring to some more elaborate codex.

By this time my interest increased, and I determined to take my treasure to Mexico and consult the authorities in the Museo Nacional.

PROFESSOR ALESSANDRO CERVANTES received me with Spanish American cordiality and enthusiasm. I had not seen him for many years, and we had much to talk over, but all else was forgotten when he saw my codex. He was tremendously excited, declared positively it was genuine, announced that it was unquestionably Mayan, and unhesitatingly placed it as belonging to the Old Empire period of the Mayan civilization, and therefore of Guatemalan origin.

"But *amigo mio!*" he exclaimed. "Of a truth it is most wonderful, most astounding. In all the world there is no such another. All others are of the New Empire. It is beyond price, *amigo*. If it can be deciphered it will solve many mysteries. *Por Dios*, yes, *amigo*. It will probably prove to be the key to much that we have puzzled over for years. It deals with Kukulcan, as my good friend Saville says; it tells of a prophecy and of a migration both, and it is historical, symbolical, religious and mythological all in one. But," he shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands, "my poor knowledge is inadequate to decipher it. However," he continued as he noticed my disappointment, "I have a very good friend who, I feel sure, can succeed where all others have failed. He dwells not here in Mexico.

No, amigo, his home is in the little town of Xibaltango in Guatemala."

"In that case," I assured him, "I shall go to Guatemala. Can you give me a letter of introduction to your friend?"

"Most gladly!" he declared with enthusiasm. "He is but a poor priest—a most holy and devoted Padre, who gives his last centavo to the poor Indios of his parish and goes hungry that they may eat, and when I scold him for so doing, what answer does Fray José make me? That it is the duty of all Spaniards, and of priests in particular, to make what amends they may for the cruelties and wrongs inflicted upon the Indios by the Spaniards in the past. *Caramba, amigo,* what reasoning! Were I, with the blood of the Aztecs in my veins, to go in rags and in bare feet and with empty stomach, would it bring Montezuma back to life; would it ease the sufferings of Guatemozin on the rack under Cortes? But Padre José is, as I say, most holy and, *amigo,* most wise and a deep student of all the past of his country. Si, Señor, he speaks a dozen of the native dialects, he knows the myths and the legends of the Indios as well as they themselves do; he takes part in their *fiestas,* and he is beloved by them all. And he reads the ancient Mayan glyphs as easily as he reads his own Castilian or the Latin of his office. Si, amigo, Fray José is the one man who may solve the riddle of your most wonderful codex."

I FOUND Fray José in his modest quarters adjoining the ancient church in the tiny Indian village of Xibaltango. I had expected to find a cowled and tonsured priest, a gray ascetic, bent with years and seamed with the marks of self-denial, fasting and a rigorous life; in fact, I expected to find the living counterpart of a saint or martyr. Instead, the man who greeted me was short, rather corpulent, with a round, brown face, merry gray eyes, and in place of cassock and cowl he wore a suit of native homespun cotton. If, as Professor Cervantes had said, he starved that his Indians might eat, then most assuredly he thrived on starvation, for he looked the picture of health. He was as jolly and merry as his features implied, and he welcomed me most cordially, apologizing for his home but assuring me, in the usual Spanish fashion, that it was all mine.

"But what would you, Señor?" he cried, dusting off an antique leather chair with his berretta and proffering it to me. "What would you? I am remote, alone, in the wilderness, among Indios, and Señor mio, I see not one white man, one stranger in many years. Yet, Señor, I am not lonely. I am happy, I love the Indios, though, of a truth I must admit it—my labors are of little avail, si. They are all Christians; all come to my little church, all are baptized, all are christened and married and buried according to the rites of the Church; but—as the illustrious Señor knows—they are pagans at heart. Not one there is, I am sure, who does not in secret worship the old gods, who does not follow out the old religion. They are Christians to please me, to gain what they may, and because they feel not too certain whether the Christian or the pagan God is the more powerful. Ay de mi, Señor, the longer I dwell among the Indios, the more I feel that never will they be other than pagan at heart. But they are good children, Señor, kind and simple and lovable and generous, and I find life not dull between my religious duties and studying the ancient traditions and striving ever to unravel the mysteries of the past. And my very good friend, the Professor Alessandro, tells me in his letter you have a codex even he cannot decipher. I fear me, Señor, that if he has failed, my poor knowledge will be of little service."

But Padre José deprecated his ability and his knowledge. "Wonderful!" he cried as he looked at the codex. "It is of the Old Empire; it is a sacred codex, a religious myth and a history dealing with Kukulcan. But, Señor, it is unlike anything else. It is Señor, I am sure, a codex in cipher. Often, on the monuments, I have found inscriptions that I feel sure are cipher, and in this so wonderful codex I see some of the same symbols. That, Señor is why no one has been able to read it. One must know the key, the code, to unravel its meaning or—hold—perchance this is the key by means of which the Mayan ciphers were read. Ah, mi Señor, you may possess that which will solve the manifold mysteries of the Mayas. But, though I regret to admit it, only a Mayan of the priest-cult could decipher it."

I was terribly disappointed. I had traveled thousands of miles; had wasted months of time and exhausted my resources, only to find that I had accomplished nothing. I laughed derisively. "In that case," I said bitterly, "the codex will never be deciphered. It is worth only its value as a specimen, curio. In order to find the man who could read it, I would have to go back several centuries and be here before the conquest. The Mayan priests are a thing of the past."

FRAY JOSE'S eyes twinkled and he chuckled. "Perhaps, my son," he said, "I may be able to help you to go back those several centuries. Would you care to do so and meet one of the long-dead priest clan?"

"What do you mean!" I exclaimed. "Do some still exist?"

He nodded. "Many things exist of which the outside world knows nothing," he declared. "Many of the Indios still worship in the ancient temples of their ancestors, and to do so they must have priests of the ancient faith. Though it is kept a secret, yet the old priest-clans still survive. I alone of all white men have learned something of them. The Indios trust me, and I devoutly believe, love me for what little I have done for them, and have confided in me to some extent. Si, Señor, I know of temples wherein they still worship, and I know of one priest of the cult of Xibalda who might reveal to you the contents of the codex. Could I in person go to him, then I feel sure he would do so, but that, Señor, I cannot do, for my duty is here; however, I will give to you that which will win his confidence and mayhap—with your knowledge of the Indios' ways, you may induce him to aid you. *Quien sabe?"*

I was elated. Even if I accomplished nothing in regard to the codex, I would have an opportunity of studying the ancient priest clan, anyhow, and I felt confident that the scientific discoveries I would make would repay me. But I soon learned that my visit to the Mayan priest was not to be accomplished as easily as I had thought.

"Katchilcan speaks only his own Zutugil dialect," Fray José informed me. "No doubt he understands some Spanish—perhaps he may even be able to converse in Spanish, but he won't do it. If you are to visit his village, in fact if you are to journey through the country, you must learn the Mayan tongue. But that, to you who have learned so many dialects of the Indios, will not be difficult nor will it take a great time, my son. My own knowledge is not accurate enough to enable me to teach you, though before you start I can aid you somewhat by imparting a knowledge of the most useful words and phrases. But I have a friend—a native Indio who cares for the little chapel at Totil—who speaks the Spanish and is most intelligent. It was he who himself taught me, and if the Señor will not mind the time and the journey, he can stop at Totil and from Pedro acquire the knowledge of the Zutigil. Totil is on the way to the village of Katchilcan."

Once having made up my mind to exhaust every chance of deciphering the codex or of establishing its

identity beyond question, I was not to be balked by the obstacle of learning a new Indian dialect, and a few days later, I bade Fray José farewell and started for the distant village of Totil.

CHAPTER II

The Prophecy

THE "that" which Fray José gave me to serve as an open sesame to the Mayan priest was a strange combination of the old and the new, of the pagan and the Christian. Upon a sheet of paper bearing the figure of the Cross, he had written a message in hieroglyphic symbols, and accompanying this, was a tiny bag of painted hide containing a medal of St. Christopher and a tiny golden image of a Mayan deity. Good Fray José was no narrow-minded bigot but was willing to recognize conditions as they were and to make necessary concessions to the occasions that arose. If the Indians were willing to please him by assuming the veneer of Christianity, he was quite willing to reciprocate by pleasing the Indians to the extent of employing pagan symbols and following pagan customs, though he had no more faith in them than the Indians had in his Church and its rites.

It is needless to describe the details of my trip to Totil or to narrate my experiences while I remained in the isolated little Indian village, studying the ancient Zutugil language under the tutelage of the painstaking patient Pedro, a dignified-looking Indian, who, being in charge of Fray José's most outlying chapel, regarded himself as a dignitary of the Church of Rome and the most important and exalted personage in the district. But, being Indian, he was Indian to the core, and I was both interested and amused to discover that he had painted the images of all the saints a mahogany brown, and had painted the figure of Christ upon the crucifix inky-black.

"It is that the people may regard them with greater reverence," he explained when I asked him about it. "How can one expect an Indian to adore the white Santos when they have received nothing but harm from those of white skin?" he asked. "And," he added, "how can the white Santos or the white Cristo know what is good for the brown Indians?" Then, a bit hesitantly and shamefacedly, "and besides, the great God of our ancestors was black and with a black Cristo before them they feel that they are worshipping Ekah and are more devout. Does the Señor think I have done wrong?"

I assured him I did not. If, by painting the images, he won more converts or added to the sincerity of their devotions, I considered the means were justified by the end. But I felt quite sure that Pedro himself preferred a black Saviour and brown saints to those with white skins, for which I could not blame him much either.

But regardless of his religious idiosyncracies, Pedro was an excellent teacher of his native tongue, and at the end of six weeks in his village, he assured me that I had mastered enough of the Zutugil language to continue on my journey; although, he added: "No white man can learn the tongue of my people. Even Fray José speaks it always with the tongue of the white man."

Accompanied by four Indians who acted as guides, porters and camp-boys, I started on what I believed at the time to be the last lap of my journey.

Truly my visit to that little shop in Vigo was leading me far afield. At Totil I left civilization behind. Beyond was wilderness; unknown, almost uninhabited country; vast forests, great mountains, wide plains; land seldom or never trod by white men, where even the old conquerors had not penetrated. For hundreds of miles there were no signs of human beings; along our route were only the occasional huts of half-savage Indians, or clusters of thatched homes of the tribesmen once—centuries before—under Mayan dominion, though now showing no traces of the culture of that wonderful race. But if no traces remained in the people, there were abundant evidences in the mute remains the Mayas had left behind. Time and again we came upon huge columns or stellae of sculptured stone in the forest, wonderful monoliths that under any other conditions I would have examined and studied with the most intense interest. Twice, too, we passed enormous ruined temples, great trees growing from their summits, tangled vines and tropical shrubs sprouting from the crevices between the stones, their wonderfully carved façades defaced by time and the elements; their interiors choked with débris, but still imposing in their majestic proportions; their beauty of design and the intricacy of their sculptured stone work. Once, too, we gazed from a hilltop upon the ruins of an immense city, upon a plain beside a river. But all was silent, deserted, forgotten.

FOR eleven days we traveled, sometimes following trails visible only to the eyes of my Indian guides, at other times hewing a way through the jungles, again following the rivers, ascending mountains, marching through great open forests. The way seemed endless; I began to fear my Indians had lost their way, when, issuing from the forest, we came to a cleared plain. Tilled fields of maize, cane, sweet potatoes and others plants covered many acres, and in the centre of the cultivated lands was a village of thatch-roofed houses gleaming like gold in the sun. That the modern village occupied the site of an ancient city was evident. Ruins of stone walls and buildings rose above the waving corn and banana trees. Towering above the village was a great pyramidal Kus* topped by a temple bearing an ornate roof-comb, and as we entered the village, we passed between two rows of sculptured stone columns. I gazed at them in amazement. They were gay with red, green and white paint; at their bases were flowers and fruits. There was no doubt of it. Here in this remote village, the old faiths still lived, the old gods were still worshipped. Very likely, the people still worshipped in the ancient temple. There, no doubt, the priest, Katchilcan, still officiated, though Fray José had not mentioned it.

My thoughts were cut short as we reached the village and I glanced about at the inhabitants. Some scurried out of sight at our approach, others stared curiously at us, still others wore hostile expressions, while some smiled friendly greetings; but one and all were totally different from any Indians we had seen. I seemed to have stepped back five hundred years, to have dropped into a Mayan village of the time of the conquest. Living duplicates of Mayan sculptures were on every side. Here were the artificially distorted skulls, the heavy noses, the elaborately ornate costumes of the Mayan bas-reliefs. Not that every individual was of that type. The features of many were typically Indian, but in every case the costumes were those of the old Mayas. There was not a coat, a shirt, a pair of trousers or a hat in the entire village. Fray José had left much untold—perhaps he had wanted to give me a surprise; perhaps it was so familiar to him that he had forgotten to mention the details. Whatever the reason—with such people before me, with the great temple on its lofty Kus now rising above my head, it seemed perfectly natural that in this spot the old priest-cult of the

*Kus.—A mound usually pyramidal supporting a temple, a shrine or [illegible] of criminal purposes.

Mayas should still survive and hold its power. And it spoke volumes for Fray José's sympathy with the natives, for the Indians' confidence and faith in the jolly Padre, that he had been allowed to visit this village, had become friendly with the priest, and that I also had been allowed to reach the place without molestation.

We had now passed through the village, had skirted the base of the temple-mound and had approached a low, ancient stone building with a sculptured frieze of jaguar heads and entwined serpents.

As we neared the building, a man stepped from the doorway, and instantly my Indians halted, stooped, and gathering handfuls of dust from the roadway, scattered it on their heads. That gesture of humbling themselves was enough to identify the man in the doorway as the high-priest of their ancient faith. I gazed at him with intense interest. He was very old. His hair was white, his brown face seamed, wrinkled, and creased until it resembled a withered, shrivelled sapodillo.* His cheek-bones seemed about to break through the tightly-drawn skin; his eyes were so sunken that they appeared mere pin points of light in the depths of the sockets, and between his eagle-beak nose and his sharp, bony chin his thin lips were like a gash among cavernous wrinkles. In his ears he wore huge plugs of carved jade; about his scrawny, turtle-like neck was a necklace of huge turquoises, garnets and crystal from which depended a gold disk representing the sun. About his head was a band of cotton woven in an elaborate geometrical pattern of red, white and green, and with two long tail feathers of the *Quetzal* rising above his forehead. He was dressed in a single loose robe of black cotton ornamented with intricate designs in the sacred red, white and green of the ancient Mayas, and he leaned upon a polished staff of black wood elaborately carved and with the upper portion covered with turquoise mosaic work.

FOR a moment he peered at me in silence, and a frown deepened the wrinkles on his forehead. I stepped forward, greeted him in Zutugil, and handed him the letter and the little skin bag I had received from Fray José.

Instantly, as his claw-like hand grasped the token, his manner changed. The frown vanished, he nodded his head, and he welcomed me to his village. Such was my meeting with Katchilcan, high-priest of To[illegible] the Rumbler—god of the Kitche-Maya, descendant of the royal line of the Great Snake of Mayapan. Fray José had spoken truly when he had said he would help me to step into the past, for Katchilcan was the past personified.

But though he was of the past, yet he was thoroughly aware of the present. How old he was no one—not even he—could say, and undoubtedly he exaggerated his age, when he declared that his parents had been killed by the soldiers of Tonatiuh (Alvarado) and that he could remember the Padre Landa. Yet who can say? Who can declare positively that an Indian may not live for three centuries or more? Be that as it may, the priest was very, very old—a centenarian beyond question—with all the wisdom of his years, a keen, alert brain, and steeped in the lore, the involved mythology, the legends, the customs and the history of his people.

Though he sedulously carried out the ceremonials and practices of his faith, though his people revered and respected him, yet he realized that his faith and his people were doomed. Never having come into contact with any Christian priest other than Fray José (unless his seemingly impossible tale were true and he *had* known Bishop Landa in his youth) he regarded the good Padre as the head of both the Christian Church and the entire white race, and as such held the most profound respect and reverence for him, aside from his personal friendship and a deep gratitude for some service rendered him, but what it was he would not reveal. For these reasons he received me as the direct representative of Fray José and treated me as the Padre's envoy. But I was far too familiar with Indian psychology to broach the purpose of my visit at once. Impatient as I was, I was forced to bide my time, to become acquainted with Katchilcan, to win his entire confidence, to lead the conversation by degrees to the myths and history of the Mayas, before I showed him the codex.

But when at last I felt the time was ripe and I spread the papyrus before him, I was wholly unprepared for the effect. With a strange, sharp cry he fell upon his knees, cast dust upon his head, and in his thin cracked voice began chanting in an unintelligible dialect. Then, rising, he reverently returned the codex to my hands.

"Blessed of the gods are you, my lord," he cried in Zutugil. "I am an old man, my lord, but were I a youth in my strength, gladly would I give half my life to possess that book."

I gasped. What secret, what import did the codex hold? What had caused the old priest to be so deeply affected by his first glance at it? Why would he have given "half his life" to have owned it? Eagerly I questioned him. For a time he was silent, motionless, thinking deeply. Then at last he spoke.

"My lord does not know?" he asked. "My lord knows not that he has the book of Kukulcan? That he holds in his hands the prophecy of him who was known to Mayapan as the 'snake with feathers?' That he holds the secret of that prophecy and its fulfillment, that he holds the symbols that no other has seen? Know you, then, my lord, that in the long ago, ere Kukulcan the 'plumed serpent' departed, he gave unto my people a prophecy. Great should the people of my race be, mighty their power and their conquests, but in the end they should wither and die. Those who builded the temples and carved the stones and placed the great images should vanish, and the gods should be forgotten, and those who remained should war one with another and should be scattered far and wide. And they should each speak with a different tongue and be divided among themselves, and should forget their greatness and their gods and their arts. But some few of the great ones should survive, and they should go far from their homes to a place called Mictolan and there they should remain and worship their old gods and have their temples and should abide, until, in the fullness of the allotted time, they should be called forth by their gods and should once more rule the land and be great again and should cast down the new gods. And that they might know when the gods called them forth, the wise Kukulcan caused to be made a book telling of the prophecy and of Mictolan, and of the hidden people, and bearing the symbol that would serve as a token to let the people know that the allotted time had passed when the book with the symbol was brought to them. And to you, my lord, has come that token, which borne to the people at Mictolan, shall call them forth to rule the land and be great once more and shall cast down the new gods. Blessed be the gods of my fathers is my lord. And [illegible] should fall to a white man to bear the [illegible] and to fulfil the prophecy is not strange, for [illegible] the Plumed Serpent was white of face and was [illegible] and it was said in the prophecy that a son of [illegible] should bear the book with the token of [illegible]."

I WAS utterly astounded at his words. But equally, of course, I did not take them literally. Much of what he said was the same well known ancient legend or myth. Much of the so-called prophecy I had heard before, for it was common to the Aztecs, the Mayas and even the Incas, and much of what had been foretold centuries before the conquest had occurred exactly as prophesied. Or perhaps, Indian like, the prophecy had been invented to fit the facts. Yet, over and over again, I, like many others, had heard the tale, the rumors of the remnants of the race dwelling in some remote, unknown, secret district, where they retained their ancient customs and religion. Was it not possible there might be truth in these stories; some foundation of fact? Such things had occurred before. There was that Aztec colony in the hidden valley in Mexico of which Professor Cervantes had told me. There was that isolated group of Incas in the interior of Peru, that had been discovered and described by Dr. Armand. And I could see no reason why, somewhere in the wild interior of Guatemala or southern Mexico, a similar colony of the Mayans might not also exist. For that matter, here was this village where I sat, where the old priest Katchilcan still held sway, where the ancient temple was still in daily use, where the sacred fires still burned continuously, where Tohil the Rumbler-god and Xibalba the Great Snake were still worshipped, where the people still lived in the past, and yet neither hidden nor secreted from the rest of the world. If such villages and people could survive almost unaltered, was there anything improbable in the idea of others, entirely cut off from the world, retaining even more of their ancient life? At any rate, of one thing I *was* convinced. My codex was the record of the prophecy of Kukulcan, it was Maya, and it was of the Old Empire. All I had journeyed so far to learn was now clear. I possessed a priceless document of the Mayas, a codex more valuable than any in existence, and if Katchilcan had not drawn upon his imagination, the actual work of that semi-mythical hero-god, the Plumed Serpent, Kukulcan, or as he was known to the Aztecs, Quetzalcoatl, himself. I was elated, overjoyed. But I wondered about that story of the isolated colony, and I wondered just how much old Katchilcan really knew, how much he had left unsaid.

"And did the prophecy fall out as told?" I asked. "Do the survivors of your race still worship their old gods and await the coming of the token? And where O, most Wise One, is this place called Mictolan?"

The old fellow's eyes held a far away look, as though he were gazing into the past and seeing the glories of the civilization of his ancestors. But at my words he came back to earth and turned towards me, his deep-set eyes, like pin-points of fire, seeming to pierce my innermost thoughts.

"That I cannot say, my lord," he replied. "But being a prophecy of the mighty Kukulcan, of a surety it must have been fulfilled. Did not my people vanish? Did they not forget their gods? Are they not scattered? Do they not speak the Pipil, the Kitche, the Zutugil, the Katchiquel and other tongues? Why then should I doubt that they still dwell in Mictolan? But where that spot may be, I know not. Upon the book that my lord has, a part of the symbol is missing. But I can read that it is to the north and west." He waved his skinny arm in a wide, all-embracing gesture towards the endless mountains. "And, my lord," he continued, lowering his voice, "maybe of this I should not speak; mayhap I have said too much already. But to him who has the Master's book, I feel I may speak freely. And my lord is not like other white men. To him has been given the token, and he must be the son of the sons of Kukulcan who also was bearded and white of skin. But even though my lord is not of the sons of the Master yet all men, white or red, are brothers at heart, although some are bad and seek only to rob and destroy. But to you, my lord, may I speak with freedom, for you come with the pledge of the great priest of your people, of him whom I know and trust as a brother though we worship different gods.

"Though I cannot say where lies this place of Mictolan, yet in the book it is written that great bars were placed in the way and cleverly was it hidden, and magic surrounds it. To reach it one must pass through the Valley of Death, through the Tunnel of the Serpents, through the pit of the great Zotional (alligator); and even then one must cross the eight deserts with the raging whirlwind that cuts the solid rock, and must face the demon Ixputeque and the fiend Neztpehua in the realm of hot ashes and the two blazing mountains, and at last must enter the cave of bats and cross the bridge of life. Did I not say, my lord, that I would give half my life to possess the book of Kukulcan? And why, my lord? Ah, for it is foretold that to him who has the book and comes by it by honest means, the way to Mictolan shall be made easy, and he shall be welcomed as a great lord and shall gain great peace and happiness and shall abide forever with the gods. So, my lord, I was told by my father, who had it from his father and from his father's father before him for many generations, aye, till one goes back even to those far-off days when all this land was of my people, and the old gods ruled and walked among men, and sacred fires burned before all the altars, and sons of the Plumed Serpent sat in their palaces."

Very impressive were the old priest's words. There was something indescribably convincing about his manner, perhaps something hypnotic. There, in the ancient room, with the ancient priest so like a Mayan sculptured figure, with the still more ancient codex—the Book of Kukulcan—in my hands, there seemed nothing improbable, nothing incongruous in his story. The prophecy seemed very real. Though under any other circumstances, among any other surroundings, I might have scoffed at it all, might have put the whole thing down as a fanciful myth, yet there, with the words of Katchilcan in my ears, somehow I felt a conviction that I was destined to find that hidden spot called Mictolan, that the whole chain of circumstances, from finding the codex in the book at Vigo to my coming to this village and meeting Katchilcan, seemed destiny and fate, and that I would fulfill that destiny.

Strange as it may appear now, at the time it never occurred to me that I might fail, that, having no definite knowledge of the site of Mictolan, if for that matter there was such a spot, I might never find it. And, quite as though I had planned to do so from the beginning, I at once set about making preparations to start on what, to me in my sober senses, would have appeared the wildest of wild goose chases, the most preposterous of adventures.

CHAPTER III

The Valley of Death

OLD Katchilcan seemed to take it as a matter of course that I would set out to carry the codex to Mictolan. That, however, was only natural, for he believed in the prophecy, the legend and the codex, and so believing he had equal faith in my being the chosen means of carrying the foretold word to the hidden people. In fact, as the days passed, I became absolutely convinced myself that there was far more than a foundation of fact in the priest's story. There was the codex. If I could obtain the key to it from Katchilcan I could decipher much of it myself

In fact, now that I examined it from the new viewpoint, I marveled that one of the many experts who had studied it, had not deciphered it. To be sure they had come very close to solving the riddle. They had recognized it as dealing with Kukulcan, they had declared it a record of a migration and a place, they had decided that it was a combination of religious, historical and geographical symbols, and they had even suggested that it was a key to some other codex. And in these surmises they had been correct. It dealt with all—Kukulcan, a migration, a locality, a prophecy, and it *was* a key or a symbol, though the most important part of that symbol—the location of the hidden city of Mictolan, was missing.

I would have given a lot to have had that missing edge of the papyrus, but there was no sense in bemoaning its loss. And as I studied the codex, and, in the light of Katchilcan's reading of it, understood it better and better, I realized why the scientists had been so puzzled over its peculiar features, its resemblance to both Aztec and Mayan codices, for it dealt with a prophecy common to both races. Kukulcan and the Aztec Quetzalcoatl were identical, and I was convinced that the precious document was prepared in the style of the picture records of the semi-mythical Toltecs, so that, in case it came into the hands of either Aztecs or Mayas, its meaning and importance would be equally plain. Now that I was sure of the immense scientific and monetary value of the codex, I was determined that no harm should befall it, and for several days I busied myself making a very accurate copy. I then packed the original in a wrapping of oiled silk and sealed it in an aluminum container.

I saw with amazement that in his outstretched hands he held a copy of the codex

Meanwhile, I had made every possible enquiry regarding the district to the northwest and, with the aid of Katchilcan, had secured the services of several Indians who claimed to be familiar with the country and all routes leading into the district. But they confessed that their knowledge was limited to a comparatively short distance. Beyond that all was unknown, unexplored, and regarded with superstitious fear by the natives. Indeed, I was surprised that I could find any Indians who would accompany me, but no doubt the old priest had had a hand in it. In all probability he assured them that I was under the direct protection of their gods, perhaps he had even hinted that I was on a sacred mission. At last all was in readiness. Supplies of maize, cacao, cassava and dried venison had been prepared, and hammocks had been made. These, with the outfit which I had brought, were enough to see my party through an expedition of at least two months, by which time I would either have succeeded, or failing, would return to the village. So, having written a long letter to Fray José, in which I told him of the results of my visit to Katchilcan and of my hare-brained undertaking, I left the village with Katchilcan's blessing, and headed for the distant mountains.

For several days it was fairly easy traveling. There were many trails, the country was fairly level, and the forests were open. But the district seemed absolutely uninhabited. Then, as we began to ascend the foothills, the trails became fewer and at last vanished; the country became wilder, and we were obliged to go entirely by the general direction and the easiest route. Often large streams, deep ravines or impassable cliffs barred our way, and we were forced to make long detours. But ever nearer and nearer the great mountains loomed ahead, and ever steeper became our way. Then one day we came suddenly upon the ruins of what had once been a great temple. I became hopeful again. Here was proof that the district had once been inhabited, that the Mayas had been here. Carefully I examined the sculptured lintels of the massive doorways searching for date-glyphs.* The few that had remained unobliterated by time were chipped, flaked and partly effaced, but among them I found two that bore dates that proved the building to go back to the Old Empire. That was reassuring. If there was any truth in the old legend, if the Mayas had migrated this way towards the hidden city, it was reasonable to suppose that their migration took years to accomplish, that they erected temples and monuments on the way. And almost daily we came upon monuments; sometimes rudely carved rocks; sometimes stellae covered with figures and symbols; and at other times remains of buildings. And as I examined these, as I realized what stupendous labor must have gone into the cutting of the great stone blocks, the time that must have been expended upon carving the intricate ornate decorations that covered every inch of their surfaces, the ever present mystery of how it was accomplished came back to me with redoubled force.

By what means, by what magic had the ancient people accomplished feats in stone-cutting, in sculpture that we, with modern methods and steel tools, could not duplicate in years of unremitting labor? Was I fated to solve that riddle? What a scientific triumph it would be if I did succeed in finding an isolated city of the Mayas, a spot where they still carried on their ancient arts, where I could actually watch the process by which they accomplished their wonderful feats?

Filled with such conjectures, possessed with a strange feeling of assurance, I led my Indians onward.

* Engraved characters disclosing or registering dates

IT was the nineteenth day after leaving Katchilcan's village, and we had been toiling steadily up a steep mountain side. Suddenly the forest ended and we halted in amazement. Before us the flat mountain top had been cleared, and in the centre stood a low, massive building of a type I had never before seen. Filled with scientific interest, at the time giving no thought to the peculiar fact that the vegetation had been cleared away, I hurried forward, intent only on examining the strange temple. It was in remarkably good condition and, anxious to examine its interior, I stepped through the huge doorway flanked by carved stone columns representing conventionalized jaguars with serpents' heads. A strange odor filled the interior. Sniffing suspiciously, trying to identify the smell, I stood motionless, waiting for my eyes to become accustomed to the semi-darkness. Then it came to me; it was the odor of burning flesh. What did it mean? Was it possible that?—yes, it must be—the temple must have been recently used. Memory of the clearing, of the condition of the building, swept over me. The temple was still in use; somewhere, very recently, a sacrifice had been made upon an altar within the building. Somewhere in the vicinity there must be Indians, who still worshipped their gods at the ancient temple. I glanced about. Opposite to where I stood was another doorway. I stepped forward towards it. The smell of burning flesh was stronger. I reached the doorway, peered within and halted in my tracks, staring agape at what I saw. On a raised dais was the gigantic image of the god Zotzilaha, grotesque, hideous, with his death's head, his outspread bat-like wings, his misshapen body. Before him upon a sacrificial altar of polished jasper was the half-consumed body of a girl resting on the dull red embers of a fire. But I scarcely saw the god of the sacrifice, for prostrate before the image and the altar were dozens of naked Indians.

To enter that sacred spot would be to meet with instant death. Only the fact that the savages' attentions were riveted upon the god had prevented me from being seen. At any instant I might be discovered. Quickly, with fast beating heart, I stepped back. My elbow knocked against the wall, a bit of dislodged masonry rattled to the ground. Instantly every Indian turned in my direction; a savage shout came from their throats, and leaping to their feet, they rushed at me. Why I was not struck down, killed instantly and offered as a sacrifice to their outraged god, I shall never know. Perhaps they preferred to capture me alive, to torture me. Perhaps I was the first white man they had ever seen and they were in some awe or fear of me. Whatever the reason, I was not harmed. I was overpowered before I could resist, though to have attempted to resist would have been hopeless. I was bound, trussed up, and with triumphant shouts was borne into the room and thrown upon the floor before the altar with its gruesome sacrifice.

Was this to be the end of my quest? Was I to be sacrificed upon that altar? Even in my extremity and my terror—for I admit I was terrified—I found myself wondering about the identity of my captors. In fact, I began to wonder whether they might not be the people I had come to find; if, through the centuries, they had not degenerated, reverted to semi-savagery, and if the hidden city was not a myth and the old temple all that remained of what had once been a real town. My speculations were cut short by one who appeared to be the priest or chief. He wore numerous gold ornaments; a feather headdress, and, if anything, was more savage-looking than his fellows. He addressed me angrily, but I could not understand a word of what he said. I tried him with Zutugil, with Spanish, with Nahuatl; all without success. He grew impatient, shook me by the shoulders, and as he did so, the copy of my codex fell from the breast pocket of my coat. As he pounced upon it, I mentally thanked Heaven that it was not the original. For an instant, the savage stared at the strip of paper. Then, with a wild cry, he leaped forward, a long-bladed obsidian dagger gleaming in his upraised hand. I felt sure my last minute had come. But instead of plunging the weapon into my breast, he slashed through the cords that bound me, and prostrated himself before me. I glanced about, rose to my feet. Everywhere the Indians were on their knees, their foreheads touching the ground. Whoever they were, whatever their race, they knew the meaning of the codex. The Book of Kukulcan had saved me.

Slowly they rose, glancing apprehensively at me, regarding me as they would a superior being—which is exactly what I seemed to them. But I had no mind to remain in that chamber of human sacrifice. Picking up the codex, I strode to the door and into the open air, followed by the silent, half-terrified, half-wondering, but wholly subdued savages.

To my dismay, my Indians were nowhere to be seen. Nothing remained but my bags and packages, which were where they were dropped. No doubt they had heard the savage yells from the temple, and having no desire to become martyrs in my behalf, they had taken to their heels.

What was I to do? Without porters to transport my outfit, I could not go on. For that matter, I could not turn back. I was stranded, deserted among these wild Indians of the mountains.

THE chief solved the problem for me. Timidly approaching me, he pointed to my abandoned dunnage; by graphic gestures, he indicated the flight of my men. Then he pointed at his companions, grinned, again pointed at the baggage, and swinging about, waved his hands in the direction of the higher mountains. No one could have misunderstood him. He realized what had occurred and he was offering to send his men with me as porters. Probably he felt that he was being greatly honored by serving me; very likely he felt that he must make amends for treating me as he had. At any rate, I indicated my acceptance. Springing forward, the chief himself shouldered the largest package as his fellows almost fought for the chance of carrying the others. I did not know where those savages lived; whether they had a village near, whether they came from afar; or whether they dwelt in huts in the forest and visited the temple only to make sacrifices to the ancient Mayan god. Neither did I know how they knew my purpose or my route, unless the chief deciphered the codex, but they seemed to know the direction to follow and, thinking that possibly they had some inkling of the location of the city of the Book of Kukulcan, I followed after.

For three days we climbed mountains, descended precipitous slopes, waded rushing streams, struggled through jungles. I could not converse with the Indians except by signs, but we managed to get along. They made the camps, secured game, caught fish, cooked the food and carried the burdens. And when, on one occasion, we came suddenly upon a tapir, and whipping out my revolver I shot the beast, I had ample evidence that they had never before been in contact with white men. With wild cries they dropped their loads, fell flat upon the ground, and fairly grovelled at my feet. And when, after some difficulty, I got them up and they examined the dead tapir, they instantly prostrated themselves a second time. They had never seen or heard firearms—of that I was certain—and I had but to touch the butt of my pistol to cause them to shake with terror and bob their heads to the earth. To them it seemed supernatural; I controlled the thunder and lightning,

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sacrifice it! It would be of no further use to me; in a moment more we would both be swept to our deaths.

Still he held the codex. Why did he wait? Fascinated, I watched him. The air vibrated to the terrific flood that was now raging in the cañon, the very ground shook. In the darkness, the upflung, boiling waves loomed white and ghastly. Now the hissing, raging maelstrom was curling about the chief's feet. Still he remained there, shouting or chanting or praying—I know not which. A moment more and the irresistible tide would boil into the cavern, would overwhelm us. And then a strange thing happened. Below the Indian's outstretched hands, with the paper spread between them, the water seemed suddenly to recede; the roar diminished, the thunder died in the distance. Slowly but surely the rushing torrent dropped back towards the river bed. The deafening turmoil died to the normal rush of the stream, and the chief, turning, folded the codex and returned it to me. We were saved, saved as if by a miracle. No doubt it was a mere coincidence; certainly the codex and the chief's invocations had nothing to do with it. The flood had reached its apex before it could wash into the cave and destroy us. But to the Indian's mind the Book of Kukulcan was responsible. Even the forces of nature must bow to the will of the Plumed-Serpent god. And somehow, despite my common sense and my reasoning, there was something about it that even to me savored of the supernatural.

Morning dawned at last, dawned to find us two alone, marooned in the cañon, with only a fraction of our supplies remaining. We were in a desperate situation. Our only course, our only chance was to go back, to return whence we had come. Soon we found that even that was impossible.

The gulley down which we had come had vanished; only a smooth precipice remained. The chief seemed unperturbed. Perhaps he still had sublime faith in the power of the Book of Kukulcan to safeguard us; perhaps it was merely the stoicism of his race. Gesturing in the direction of down-stream he shouldered his load and led the way. A mile farther on we came upon the body of one of the Indians, battered, mangled, the flesh torn in shreds from the bones. Three others were found later, and as we passed the last, for we could not bury the bodies in the bare rocky cañon, a sudden thought flashed through my mind. The Valley of Death! Was this it? Were the words of Katchilcan being borne out? I shivered a bit at the thought. His words came vividly back to me: "But for him who holds the Book of Kukulcan, the way will be made easy." Surely, if ever a place could be called the Valley of Death, this terrible cañon was it, and assuredly to me and to the chief who had held the codex in his hands above the raging waters, the way had "been made easy" as compared with the fate of the four Indians. But would the "way be made easy" for the rest of our journey? Would we eventually find a way out?

CHAPTER IV

Through the Tunnel of the Serpents

MY question was soon answered. The cañon narrowed and swung sharply to one side. Rounding the bend, we halted in dismay. Before us the walls met in a sheer cliff. At its base was a yawning black opening into which the river poured like a gigantic mill-race. The way was barred; we were in a cul-de-sac.

We were trapped, only one slender chance of escape remained: to retrace our steps, follow up the stream and trust to finding some lower spot, some slope or side gulley, near the head of the cañon. The chief realized our predicament and our one chance as quickly as I did. Without a word, he wheeled and led the way up stream. Wearily, slowly—for walking over the water-worn ledges and rough, loose cobbles was torture—we stumbled up the cañon, our backs aching with our burdens. Mile after mile we traveled, not halting even for a midday meal, for our one thought, our one desire was to escape from that Valley of Death before darkness overtook us and we were forced to spend another night in the fearful place. The cañon seemed endless, though it was probably not over twenty miles in length, and it was mid-afternoon before we passed the cave that had been our shelter the night before.

Hurrying, stumbling, slipping, cursing as the way became rougher and the grade steeper, we forced our blistered, bruised feet onward. The walls of the great cleft drew nearer and nearer together, until they seemed to overhang our heads, and we were in semi-darkness in the depths. Presently, from ahead, came a new sound, a low reverberating roar, and a mile or so farther on we came in sight of the head of the cañon, and our hearts sank in dismay. Once more we were faced with a mighty wall of rock down which the stream poured in a series of cataracts. There seemed no escape, no hope. We were doomed. But as I stared at the flashing, roaring falls, a faint hope rose in me. On either side of the descending water, the cliff had been worn and cut into rough, irregular masses. It might be possible to ascend the precipice in that spot. I tried to explain it to the chief, to indicate my intention, and presently he grasped my meaning and nodded. But to climb that perpendicular wall even with the rough crags and footholds would be utterly impossible with the heavy packs upon our shoulders. We must abandon our loads or resign ourselves to remaining in the cañon to die like trapped rats.

Ripping open the packages, I filled my pockets with the most essential things, made up two small packs, and strapping these to the shoulders of my comrade and myself we commenced the difficult and perilous ascent. It was terrible work. The rock was rotten, and at any instant might give way and precipitate us to the rocks below. Inch by inch we struggled upward, often so close to the falls that we were drenched, at other times straddling and crawling far to one side, clinging with toes and fingers, our hands torn and bleeding. Twenty, forty, fifty feet we ascended, when we came to a narrow ledge or shelf running diagonally across the face of the cliff. To the right the ledge dwindled to nothing; above us there was not a crevice, not a finger hold in sight; to the left, the shelf vanished beneath the column of water falling from far above. Our only chance was to pass *beneath* the fall and trust to finding a passable way upward on the farther side.

There was no time to lose, the bottom of the cañon was already hidden in blackness, the sun had set, and to be caught by darkness upon the face of the cliff would mean certain death. Flattening ourselves against the wall, edging along with the utmost caution, we crept along the narrow ledge and beneath the cataract. Spray and dripping water drenched me to the skin and poured from the naked body of the Indian; the rock underfoot was slippery with slime and moss, but the ledge widened as we proceeded. We were half way through, the worst of the passage was over when with my outstretched left hand, I felt the solid rock come to an end, and an instant later, I found myself at the entrance to a dark cavern in the cliff. I peered within. All was blackness. But here at least was a refuge where we might pass the night. It was far better than attempting to scale the rest of the cliff in the darkness, and utterly done, famished, and spent, I stepped within the cave, threw down my pack and dropped to the floor. Like my own shadow, the chief did the same. Presently,

having regained our breaths and rested, I struck a light and peered about. By the faint glimmer of the match I could see nothing. The cave was evidently large; it seemed fairly dry, but close to the entrance, water dripped and spattered in from the cataract. On hands and knees, feeling our way, fearing we might come upon a chasm or an abrupt drop, we crawled farther into the

The next instant I looked back with a startled cry

cave. Then, having reached a spot beyond the reach of spray and water, we rummaged in our packs and ravenously devoured most of the few scraps of dried meat, the sour tortillas and the parched corn they contained. To build a fire was impossible. We had no fuel, nothing that could be burned, and in the dense blackness we threw ourselves upon the bare rocky floor and dropped instantly to sleep.

I awoke cramped, aching in every joint and muscle. But it was broad daylight outside the cave, a soft light streamed into the entrance, and by its faint illumination I could distinguish our surroundings. Less than a yard above our heads was the arched roof, on either side were smooth water-worn walls, but in the rear the tunnel-like cave vanished in impenetrable blackness.

Everything about it—the smoothly-cut rock walls, roof and floor—the absence of débris and litter, the shape of the cavern, indicated that it had once formed a subterranean channel for the river, or for a portion of it. Perhaps even now it formed an overflow for the waters when in flood. And as this dawned upon me, a new hope rose in my breast. Perhaps, possibly, the cavern might connect with the open air. By following it, we might come out above the falls. There were one hundred chances to one against it; we might find it ended in narrow cracks or fissures; it might lead to a perpendicular shaft; it might bring us to the verge of an underground pool or stream. But the one chance was worth trying, and, having breakfasted upon the last of our provisions, we started on our exploration of the tunnel.

FOR an hour or more we crept forward. The tunnel remained the same size; it led gradually upward, and my hopes that it would lead us to freedom increased as we proceeded. And when, after what seemed endless crawling, we saw a faint light ahead, I felt sure we would soon be safely in the outer air. Brighter and brighter the light became, and we hurried forward. The light came from above and illuminated a mass of fallen rock that half-filled the tunnel before us.

As we reached the débris and I started to scramble over the stones, the air suddenly vibrated with a strange whirring sound that seemed to issue from every side. For an instant I hesitated, listening, yet vaguely conscious that I had heard that same sound before. The next instant I leaped back with a startled cry. From a crevice among the rocks, a great flat, arrow-shaped head had darted out, had struck viciously at me, and had missed me by the fraction of an inch. Now I knew. The place was a den of immense rattlesnakes!

The chief fairly shook with terror, his eyes rolled and he glanced furtively to right and left, seeking some spot where his naked skin would be out of reach of the angry serpents that now were wriggling, coiling, swarming among the rocks about us. Again the prophecy of Kukulcan had been borne out; here indeed was the tunnel of the serpents!

To go back was useless, the passage led only to that dismal cañon, and even had we wished to do so we could not return. Already, dozens of the great diamond-marked snakes were coiled with threatening, swaying heads and vibrating rattles behind us. To go forward seemed equally impossible. We could not even remain where we were, for at any instant a serpent might appear from the crevices beneath our feet. Yet to reach the opening, to gain the exit to the tunnel that now was clearly before us, we must cross a dozen yards of the serpents' den. Whichever way we turned, we seemed doomed to a terrible death. Then a seeming miracle happened. There was a sharp squeal, dirt and pebbles rattled down from above, and the next second a peccary

tumbled into the tunnel. Snorting, squealing, leaping about, the angry, terrified creature dashed hither and thither, utterly unmindful of our presence, every bristle on his thick neck on end, his tusks clashing, his wicked eyes gleaming, froth drooling from his upcurled lips. The deadly enemy of all snakes, fearless in attacking the most venomous serpents, the wild pigs or peccaries of the American jungles will go out of their way to kill snakes and seem to go absolutely mad when they are near them. And this peccary had accidentally, or possibly intentionally, slipped into a den of snakes. In a perfect frenzy he dashed at every snake in sight, moving with incredible speed, slashing at them with his razor-edged tusks, leaping upon them with his sharp-pointed hoofs. In less time than it takes to tell it, the place was filled with dead and dying, mangled and headless serpents, and those remaining alive had their attentions fully occupied with the maddened pig and his insatiable lust to kill. Springing forward, we reached the opening, and grasping roots, digging our toes and hands into the rotten rock, we scrambled up and drew ourselves panting upon the ground under the forest trees.

For a time the grunts and squeals of the peccary came from the depths of the pit, but gradually they ceased and, crawling to the verge of the hole, I peered down. But the creature to whom we owed our lives had vanished.

Perhaps he knew another way out, perhaps he had dashed down the tunnel to the waterfall and had scrambled up by some narrow trail that only a peccary could follow. But to the chief there was but one explanation of the pig's opportune arrival and its disappearance as soon as we had been saved. To his primitive mind, the peccary was the direct instrument of Kukulcan, a god or spirit in porcine form. Plucking a sharp thorn from a nearby vine, he pierced his tongue, smeared the blood from the wound upon a pebble and cast it into the rattlesnakes' den. He had paid his debt, had made a blood sacrifice to his gods.

Still, we were not out of our imminent peril. We were in an unknown forest, completely at a loss as to which way to turn, without supplies or food.

I was ravenously hungry and I presume my Indian companion was as famished as I was. The first thing to be done was to secure something to eat, and to do this in the tropical forest is not such a simple matter. Had the chief possessed weapons, he no doubt could have secured game of some sort in a short time; but he had lost his bow and arrows somewhere in the cañon; he could not use my revolver, and our only chance appeared to lie in stalking some bird or quadruped that I could kill with my pistol. And I well knew, from past experiences, that game is always scarcest when it is wanted the most. Luck, however, was with us still. We flushed a big wild turkey from her nest. As she ruffled her feathers and gobbled defiance at us, I brought her down with an easy shot, and to my delight—though it mattered little to my companion—the eggs proved fresh. I still had matches in a watertight case, and presently a fire was blazing and the appetizing odor of broiling turkey filled our nostrils.

IT was while we were dining on the half-scorched, but delicious-tasting meat, that I made an important discovery. Hitherto I had been able to make no headway in my efforts to converse with my companion. I had tried again and again to learn something of his dialect, but without success, although I had acquired a few simple words and could now and then catch the meaning of what he said. I had tried every Indian dialect I could remember—in vain. But now, as I gnawed a drumstick of the turkey, it brought to memory a meal that I had eaten under somewhat similar circumstances in Honduras years before. And with that memory came sudden recollection of the Tecun dialect I had once known. Some of the words and phrases came back to me, and with no least expectation that he would understand them, I repeated them to the chief. He dropped the bone he was gnawing, a gleam of understanding illuminated his face, and to my unbounded joy and amazement, he answered me in Tecun.

No one who has never been alone with a fellow man and unable to converse with him can appreciate what it meant to be able to talk with the savage beside me. To be sure, his knowledge of the Tecun was as limited as my own, but we could understand each other, could express thoughts, could ask questions and give replies and could even converse to a limited extent. The chief was as pleased as myself. He informed me his name was Maliche, that he and his tribe dwelt in a large village near the "Great Water," which I took to be Lake Itzaltango, and that they were returning from a war with the Mitzes and were celebrating their victory by making an offering of one of their prisoners, when I had come upon them in the ancient temple. I tried my best to learn if he and his people were of the Maya race, if he believed in the Mayan gods, but my command of the Tecun was too limited. But from the manner in which he had behaved at his first sight of my codex, and his action when the flood had threatened us in the cañon, I felt sure that the gods of the Mayas were his and that his ancestors had been under Mayan rule, if not of the Maya race. It was far more important for us to find food and to proceed on our way than to discuss racial affinities and religions, however. The first problem was soon solved by Maliche. In less than an hour, he had fashioned a crude but serviceable bow and several long arrows of cane tipped with palm wood, and if I had had any doubts as to the ability of my companion to provide food for us with his hastily manufactured weapons, they were soon dispelled, for within twenty minutes after we had started on our way, he had killed a small deer.

But even the savage instinct and attainments of Maliche could not solve the question of our route. To

Unmindful, the pecarry dashed back and forth among the group of poisonous snakes

be sure, our direction had been towards the northwest when we had come to the cañon, and it was a simple matter to continue in a northwesterly direction. But we had no means of knowing whether we were five, fifteen or fifty miles north, east, south or west of the spot where we had descended into the Valley of Death, as I now mentally called it.

Strangely enough, it never occurred to me to turn back, to try to retrace our way toward civilization. I seemed to be urged onward, drawn by some power or force, and to this day that, to my mind, was perhaps the most remarkable feature of the whole astounding and incomprehensible adventure. To proceed through an unknown country with no outfit, no comforts, practically no necessities of life; with no provisions except what food could be met on the way; to wander aimlessly for an unknown goal would have been nothing short of madness, viewed from a point of common sense. Yet I, an old hand at tropical exploration, with years of experience, was doing what, in any other, I should have condemned as suicidal. Yet at the time, I was filled with a sublime confidence and faith. Except when face to face with some imminent peril, I felt no fear of the outcome and, looking back upon those days of wanderings, I feel positive that some power far greater than my own will led me onward. It may sound ridiculous, fanciful, superstitious, even incredible. But in view of the many incredible happenings that followed, nothing to me will ever appear incredible or impossible again.

But I am getting ahead of my story and must go back to the point where Maliche and I were wandering through the vast forest of the mountains.

Had we been able to get a view of the country about, we might have recognized landmarks, might even have caught a glimpse of the distant volcanoes which, I was convinced, were the two "blazing mountains" indicated on the codex.

But we were hemmed in by higher ridges than the one we were on, and we were, moreover, steadily descending, getting deeper and deeper between the surrounding mountains. By mid-afternoon we were in a valley covered with dense jungle and giant bamboos. The ground was wet and soggy; here and there were pools of stagnant water, and often we were forced to make long detours around impassable swamps. To camp in such a place was out of the question, and we pushed on, hoping to reach drier and higher land before nightfall. Suddenly Maliche, who was leading, sprang back with a half smothered cry of mingled fear and surprise. Reaching his side, I peered ahead.

STRETCHING from the edge of the bamboos, through which we had been forcing our way, was a small lake, its waters inky-black and as smooth as oil, a dismal, ominous-looking pool made far more dismal and more ominous by the presence of a gigantic stone image rising from the very centre of the lake. Instantly I recognized it. The half-recumbent figure with flexed knees, upraised head and with hands upon stomach was unmistakable. It was a colossal image of Chac-Mool the Maya rain-god. But it was different from any statue of Chac-Mool I had ever seen, for it rested upon the back of an enormous crocodile with open, hideous jaws and upraised tail startlingly life-like in its details. Fascinated by the marvel of the stupendous piece of sculpture, for it appeared to have been cut from a solid mass of living rock that jutted from the lake, I stared at it, only half conscious that Maliche had prostrated himself before it. The next instant I leaped back with a shout of terror. Within a dozen feet of where I stood, the black water had broken, an enormous head with unwinking green eyes and long jaws set with gleaming teeth had appeared, and with a rush, the huge saurian had dashed towards me. I was only just in time to seize the praying Maliche by his hair and drag him to one side. Carried half his twenty-foot length out of the water by the force of his rush, the crocodile's jaws met in a crash within six inches of the chief's legs.

And the horrible monster was not alone. Everywhere the placid black surface of the lake was being churned into waves by dozens, hundreds of immense, ravenous crocodiles all rushing towards us. Neither were we safe from their attacks on land. Snapping their jaws, lashing to right and left with their ponderous tails, racing over the muddy ground far faster than I would have imagined their short legs could carry them, the horde of monsters came after us. I ran as I had never run before. Bursting through bamboo thickets, torn by thorns, cut by razor grass, stumbling, plunging into the mire, tripping over snake-like vines and roots, we raced for dry land, and only ceased when we had gained the hillside and dropped exhausted, out of possible reach of the demoniacal beasts that were still thrashing and snapping in the dense jungle beneath us.

Truly old Katchilcan had been right when he had said that "great bars were placed in the way to Mictolan." And an involuntary shudder ran through me, a strange sensation of superstitious fears caused my scalp to tingle, as I realized how literally all he had said had come to pass! The Valley of Death, the Tunnel of the Serpents, the Pit of Zotional (the sacred alligator-god) all had been met exactly as foretold, exactly as was written in the codex!

Was it possible, could it be possible that all the rest would prove true also? I shook off the foolish, superstitious idea with an effort, and strove to use my common sense. Everything so far might have been mere coincidences. The cañon was only a valley of death because the Indians had lost their lives in it. Practically every underground tunnel and cavern might harbor snakes, and alligators swarmed in every forest lake. Yet, there was that image of Chac-Mool upon the giant alligator's back, and there were the two volcanoes I had seen, and I knew—without looking at my codex—that it bore the symbol of Chac-Mool above the figure of a conventionalized crocodile. But the rest—the eight deserts, the whirlwind, the demon, the fiend and all the other supernatural impossible things, they of course were utter nonsense. For that matter—I laughed at my fears as it occurred to me—the Pool of the Alligators was no bar to us; we could go around it easily enough. Casting all surmises and half-formed fears aside, I rose, told Maliche we would camp on the mountain side, and led the way to a spot far up the hillside where a spring gushed from between the rocks and the wide-spreading roots of a giant tree afforded excellent shelter from a possible shower.

CHAPTER V

The Demon of the Night

I HAD been overconfident when I had assumed that it would be possible to go around the lake and that it formed no real bar to our progress. Everywhere, the water extended for miles among the clumps of bamboos and jungle, and we gave it a wide berth, keeping well up on the hillside and searching for a dry spot where we might cross the valley. But in this we were fated to be disappointed.

The water dwindled to a narrow lagoon barely fifty feet in width, and then expanded into a second lake. It would have been a simple matter to have waded across the place had it not been for the alligators or crocodiles (I am not sure which they were); but their presence was attested by the snouts, backs and eyes that every-

where dotted the surface of the water like half-submerged logs. There was, however, one way of crossing it. An immense tree had toppled from the mountain side and had fallen athwart the black pool, its summit resting on the opposite shore. But it was a ticklish bridge at best. It was round, slippery, and its lower surface was in the water itself, so that as one crossed by it, one's feet were scarcely a yard above the pool with its watchful, lurking inhabitants waiting with hungry jaws to dash at one. For an hour or more we waited, trying to summon up the courage to attempt the crossing, until at last, unable to endure the inaction longer, I rose, removed my shoes, and telling Maliche I was going to risk it, I slipped as silently as possible towards the roots of the fallen tree.

Realizing that if I were to reach the farther shore in safety, I must make a dash for it, I waited for a moment, breathing deeply, and then, with a silent prayer and with my eyes fixed on the opposite shore, I took my life in my hands and raced over the log. A dozen times I slipped and nearly fell, a dozen times I had an almost irresistible temptation to glance to one side or the other, to look down at the water. My ears sensed the splashing of dozens of tails, the snapping of dozens of terrible jaws. The log seemed endless, but at last, with panting lungs and pounding heart, I covered the last few yards of the natural bridge, stumbled through the tangle of dead branches, and dropped, faint and trembling, upon the opposite bank.

A moment later Maliche joined me. Slowly, one by one, the baffled alligators sank from sight, and thankful indeed that we had survived, we resumed our way. Several hours later we reached the summit of the mountain and to my delight saw the twin peaks of the volcanoes looming sharp and clear a little to the east. Pointing to these landmarks, I told Maliche our way led towards them, and to make my meaning clearer, I showed him the codex with the volcanoes indicated upon it. Instantly he burst out in a torrent of wild incomprehensible words, he shook his head, his eyes were wide with fear, and he gestured excitedly. Even when, partly calmed, he tried to explain in Tecun, I could not make head or tail of his meaning. But when I asked him bluntly if he was afraid to go on, and informed him I was going anyway, he shook his head, declared he was my slave and my shadow, and denied all dread. Poor, good, faithful Maliche! Savage cannibal though he was, yet he was as brave, as true, as fine a man as ever lived. To him I owe a debt of gratitude I can never repay, for without him and his companionship, all my efforts would have been in vain. And had I but known what he was trying to tell me, had I understood his dialect, much that followed might have been avoided. And yet, perhaps, it was all in the plan, all a part of the destiny that beckoned me, with an unseen but irresistible finger, from beyond those smoking cones to the east.

We marched steadily all that day, traversing rolling hills covered with forest, meeting with no adventure, fortunate in securing game, and always with the twin cones in sight.

For two days this continued. The land was almost park-like in its beauty, its open glades, its flashing streams, its giant trees. We fared well, the weather was perfect, and all our past sufferings and perils were forgotten. But on the third day the surroundings changed. The forest gave place to scrubby, brushy jungle; the soft earth was replaced by rough, rocky, sterile ground; great boulders were to be seen here and there, and in places we crossed bare areas of jagged broken rock. Rapidly the vegetation grew more and more sparse and the rock-strewn areas wider. Aloes, cacti and spiny bromeliads took the place of vines, shrubs and trees, and by mid-afternoon we came to the last of the vegetation and halted at the edge of a vast barren expanse of raw red rock, immense black boulders and dunes of glaring multicolored sand. I had thought a desert could not exist, but here before us was a veritable desert—the burnt-out, cinder-blasted, lava-covered plain, desolated by some past eruption of the volcanoes, that now towered to the zenith within a dozen miles of where we stood.

And once more I felt that strange tingling of my scalp, that indescribable fear of the supernatural, as I remembered the prophecy—the words of Katchilcan, "and beyond the Pit of the great Zotional, even then one must cross the eight deserts."

BUT once again I laughed my fears away. There was nothing strange, nothing supernatural about this lava flow. It was exactly the same formation as the "Bad Lands" of our own northwest. Provided with plenty of water and food anyone could cross it. It was barely a dozen miles in width—a few hours' tramp to the farther side—and there was only one desert.

But to cross so late in the day would be foolish. It was wiser to camp for the night, and start fresh at dawn before the cinder and lava scintillated with the heat of the tropical sun.

Moreover, and this thought quite drove any lingering foolish fears from my mind, the fact that everything so far agreed with the codex and with Katchilcan's words, pointed towards my ultimate success, towards the actual existence of the hidden city of Mictolan, though I very much doubted if the ancient secret city would still be inhabited. More probably, I thought, it would be in ruins, for in the two thousand years and more that had passed since the Book of Kukulcan was made, there was every chance that the people—always provided there had been any—would have died out, migrated to other localities, been decimated by wars or would have reverted to a semi-savage nomadic life. Cut off from the rest of their race, no longer under the rule of the ancient empire, and outside the influence of the culture and civilization of their fellows, there was scarcely a chance that the colony had survived as an entity, or at least as a civilized community, for twenty centuries and more. The whole known history of the Mayas was against it. The empire had fallen and vanished through the jealousies and feuds of various leaders and the political wars. States and cities had been split up, divided into factions, and I felt sure that the same causes and the same racial traits that had caused the abandonment of such cities as Copan, Chichen-Itza, Lubaantum and other great Mayan centres would also have resulted in the abandonment of Mictalon, if that city had existed.

We decided to camp at the desert's edge, as I have said, but, there was no water at the spot, and Maliche slipped away and returned within an hour with two large gourds or calabashes filled with water from a stream we had passed several miles back. Even though the bare area was so small, I felt that it would be wise to carry a supply of water with us. In the tropical jungles, where there is always a superfluity rather than a scarcity of water, no one ever dreams of carrying a canteen, but the calabashes would serve excellently for the purpose. The night passed uneventfully, and before the sun had risen, we were up and tramping across the barren waste towards the dim shapes of the volcanoes, whose summits emitted a soft red glow against the rapidly-paling sky.

The air was cool and fresh, and even though the sharp bits of rock and loose ash of the desert were hard on our feet, it was a rather welcome change—at least to me—after the interminable jungles. Maliche, however, was ill at ease. As the sun rose higher, he glanced apprehensively about, kept close to me and

A giant pterodactyl swooped down, apparently heading straight in our direction

seemed nervous. Possibly it was merely the Indian's inherent dread of the unknown, perhaps it was superstition, or a premonition, or again it may have been merely the effect of the strangeness, the newness of a desert, upon a man accustomed all his life to forests and jungles. As the sun rose higher we suffered from the heat and glare, but we had already made good headway, and I flattered myself we would be at the farther side of the desert before the hottest part of the day. But though we tramped for hours, though the sun reached the zenith, although the ashes under our blistered feet felt like redhot iron, though the air was like the blast from a furnace, though our eyes ached and blurred with the blinding glare, we seemed no nearer the distant volcanoes, and the farther side of the desert seemed ever to recede as we advanced. Our throats were parched and dry and the warm water in the gourds seemed only to add to our thirst. Still we kept on, and by the middle of the afternoon we could see that we actually were making progress, that the green hillsides behind us were faint and hazy in the distance, that the vegetation ahead was nearer, clearer, though the twin cones seemed as far away as ever. Not until the sun was sinking in the west did we reach the edge of the blasted plain and the vegetation beyond it. But the spot that had appeared green and cool from a distance was little better than the desert itself; a growth of harsh dry grass, dull-green cacti, stiff-leaved aloes, thorny bromeliads, stunted shrubs and bushes and a few spiny-stemmed dwarf palms. Farther in, the growth was thicker, greener and more promising, but there was no water, and the few drops remaining in our calabashes barely wetted our dry and dusty mouths. Maliche, however, had the instincts of the primitive savage, the ability to make the most of Nature's scantiest resources, and though I am quite sure he had never before seen a desert or desert plants, though he had never been in want of water, yet he at once rose to the emergency. Cutting off the top of a huge barrel-shaped cactus, and scooping out the pithy interior, he soon had several quarts of clear cool sap which—although slightly bitter in taste—was the most delicious draught that ever passed my lips. Too tired to go a step farther, we stopped where we were, ate what remained of our meat, and slept on the bare sand. Little did we know what lay before us when, on the following morning, we rose with aching limbs and swollen feet, and with only cactus sap to allay our hunger, again resumed our way. We were buoyed up with the expectations of finding water and game, of traveling through the cool forests once more; we felt the worst was over, and we pushed our way through the dusty thorn-covered vegetation, but we had not gone one hundred yards when the brush thinned and before us stretched a second ash-covered plain. The vegetation that I had thought was the limit of the desert was

merely a narrow strip, a hedge between the desert we had crossed and the one before us.

WEARY, hungry, blistered as we were, there was no choice but to continue. The plain before us was smaller than the first, and having filled our gourds with the cactus juice, we grimly faced the burned-out world and the sufferings we knew were ahead of us. By noonday we had crossed it, had reached the luring vegetation on the farther side, only to find that beyond that was still another desert.

But we were slightly better off now. Maliche stalked and killed a gopher-like animal that resembled a giant prairie-dog; we tasted the pulpy fruits of a cactus and found them edible, and I discovered a hollow in the sand filled with the eggs of some large lizard. With our stomachs filled, we felt far better, and the barren waste ahead appearing small, we decided to attempt the crossing before dark. The next few days—I lost all track of time—were a nightmare. Whether there were eight or eighty deserts I shall never know. They seemed interminable, endless, each promising to be the last, only to deceive us as another appeared beyond. And still those silent smoking peaks with their baleful glare at night seemed as distant as ever. My brain reeled, visions hovered before my bloodshot, smarting eyes; my entire body seemed shrivelled, dried, desiccated.

We ate whatever came our way—lizards, snakes, horned-toads, even insects. Maliche's ribs and joints seemed on the point of breaking through his skin; my face and hands were raw; streamers of skin hung in shreds from my neck and wrists, but still we kept on, and at last, more dead than alive, came to the end of the hellish wastes of lava and ash and reached the black basaltic ridges that led up to the flanks of the mighty volcanoes now close at hand. Between the frowning cliffs a stream flowed through a green swale, and with our last remaining strength, we reached the bank and plunged into the water.

For hours we lay there, our burned, tortured bodies laved by the cool water, absorbing it, reveling in it, until at last, refreshed, our smarting raw flesh comforted and eased, hunger forced us to emerge and search for food.

Alone I might have starved after all, but Maliche was a child of the wilderness; he seemed able literally to smell game if it were near, and he soon secured two pheasant-like birds, while I felt quite proud of myself for having captured a dozen or more big crayfish from beneath the stones in the river's bed.

We had been through a terrible ordeal, and I thanked God that the "whirlwind that cut the rocks" had been spared us, even though all the other terrors of Katchilcan's story had materialized according to schedule. Still—and I glanced apprehensively about and shivered at the thought—there was yet time, for despite my common sense and reason I was becoming imbued with the idea, obsessed with the conviction that the Book of Kukulcan would be borne out to the letter. Indeed, so foolishly (or so I considered it) superstitious, or credulous, had I become that my half-formed fears of what was to come were allayed by remembrance of the old priest's statement that the way would be made easy to him who owned the codex. I rather smiled at the thought. If our way across those terrible deserts had been "easy," then Heaven have mercy on the unfortunate to whom the passage was hard!

But whatever might be in store, there seemed nothing threatening in the spot where we were at the moment, and I cannot hope to describe the delight, the comfort, the luxury of the soft green foliage, the cool moss-covered earth, and the babbling of the stream after those nightmarish days of endless sand, lava and scorching, blistering sun.

With our stomachs filled with good food, with our weary limbs rested, with the musical sound of the brook and the chirping of insects in our ears, we stretched ourselves upon the soft earth and slept.

With a start, an involuntary yell, I leaped up, dazed, bewildered, trembling. Was it a nightmare or a reality that had awakened me, terrified me? Maliche too, was awake. He, too, was shaking, glancing about with terror on his face. Had the same thing aroused him, to leave him weak, filled with nameless dread, or had my yell, my movement, awakened him? With stammering tongue, I formed a question. But the words died on my lips, my face blanched and I shook, shivered, cowered as the still night air was rent by a blood-curdling, piercing, demoniacal scream from somewhere in the blackness.

As the terrible, unearthly, banshee-like wail died down in a long-drawn quavering howl, I could hear Maliche's teeth chatter, and chills ran up and down my own spine. What was it? What dread creature had emitted that awful sound? I had heard jaguars, pumas, ocelots, every wild beast and bird of America—but none were like this; nothing, no other cry or sound held in it the terror, the weird, the ghastly, nightmarish, supernatural quality of this cry. Then, once more, the night was shattered by that cry that might have issued from a tortured soul in Purgatory. Maliche fairly babbled with fear, I had an insane desire to cover my head, to flatten myself on the ground, to stuff my ears, to shut out that unearthly sound that rose and fell and that seemed to come from every side. And then, as with fear-wide eyes I glanced up, scream after scream came from my lips. Above us, moving swiftly, silently back and forth, a great black shadow against the starlit sky, was an immense shape—a monstrous something with huge eyes that glowed like green fire. Maliche saw it at the same instant. With a scream of abject terror he flung himself on the earth. "Izputeque!" he yelled, "Izputeque!"

Like a volplaning airplane the thing swooped towards us, uttering that blood-freezing shriek as it came. In a frenzy of fear, powerless to move, bereft of thought, I unconsciously whipped out my revolver, and as fast as I could press trigger, fired all six shots at the horrible thing. As the reports of the shots thundered and echoed from the surrounding cliffs, a scream more horrible than those that had gone before came from the huge, winged thing. I felt a rush of wind, a nauseating odor filled my nostrils; there was a terrific crash, and all was still.

Trembling, shaken, wide-eyed we sat there. But only the chirping of insects, the burbling of the stream, the soft sighing of the night wind and the occasional cry of an owl broke the silence. Whatever the terrible thing was, it was not supernatural. It had not been immune to soft-nosed .45 calibre bullets, and somewhere in the dark shadows it was lying dead, crushed and forever stilled.

But there was no more sleep for us that night, and neither of us could summon up enough courage to investigate the fallen demon of the night in the darkness.

CHAPTER VI

The End of Maliche

WITH the dawning of another day, our courage returned. And as soon as it was light enough to see we rose and peered about—still a bit fearfully—in search of the living nightmare I had shot down. We did not have far to seek. A few rods from where we stood, a confused, black mass rested upon the

ground, looking so much like the wreck of a cracked-up airplane that for a moment I felt sure I had inadvertently brought down an aircraft. But as we cautiously approached it, I saw it was no machine of fabric and metal, but the body of a gigantic beast. With amazed eyes, half-incredulously, I stepped nearer and examined it, while Maliche, all his superstitions aroused, fell on his knees and bowed his head to the earth. I could not believe my eyes, could not credit my senses, and yet there was no doubt about it. The broken motionless thing was a gigantic Pterodactyl! There were the great bat-like membranous wings now crumpled, torn and twisted. There was the long skinny neck ending in the immense scaly head with six-foot, sharp-toothed jaws. There were the huge, baleful, staring green eyes now glazed in death, and there were the powerful, long-clawed, alligator-like feet. The thing was a survivor of long-past ages, a flesh and blood fossil! I had killed a monster that was supposed to have become extinct hundreds of thousands of years before! I had brought down a specimen that—had I had the means of preserving it—would have brought me a fortune, that would have made me famous. And as I gazed at the gigantic, horrible looking, but now harmless thing, I bitterly regretted that it must lie there and rot, that it should provide many a meal for the hungry vultures already circling overhead, that it would be forever lost to science and that—if I ever succeeded in reaching civilization—my story would unquestionably be scoffed at and I would be dubbed a liar. I would have given much for a camera, even for the possibility of preserving a portion of the monstrous thing. Even in death it was horrible, uncanny, fiendish, and with a start I remembered Maliche's terrified words of the night—"Izputeque!" and the words of Katchilcan; "and one must face the demon Ixputeque." Was this fearsome prehistoric creature the demon? Was it possible he might have existed, might have haunted this spot for centuries. Was it possible he had been here when the Book of Kukulcan was made? Or were there others; had the things survived here when in all other parts of the world they had become extinct? And would the "Fiend Neztpehua" eventuate? Would it prove to be some weird, monstrous, prehistoric leftover?

There was no use in speculating, but with that crumbled Pterodactyl lying on the ground before me almost anything seemed possible, even probable. To Maliche, however, the creature was far more than a dead winged lizard. To him it was the incarnate form of his demon-like god, Izputeque, and he was muttering prayers and making a blood offering to it as I turned away.

Our route that day was directly towards the nearer of the two volcanoes, whose rumblings we could now distinctly hear. By following the narrow valley between the bare rocky ridges, the way was easy, for there was no jungle, there were few patches of forest, and it was much like walking through a huge park. Game, however, was scarce. Indeed, with the exception of a few small birds, we saw no forms of life, and I assumed that the great Pterodactyl had practically exterminated the denizens of the place. But there were plenty of fish and crayfish in the stream, and we did not worry over our food supply. Before sundown we had ascended fully one thousand feet and could look back over a vast extent of country with the glaring red, white and yellow deserts spread like a map below us. Nothing disturbed our rest that night and, feeling that the worst part of our journey was over, we resumed our march the next morning. As we climbed higher, the country became rougher and wilder; great jagged black crags rose on every side, long débris slopes of glistening obsidian broke the green hillsides; the stream tumbled in flashing cascades down outjutting ledges, and ever louder and louder was the dull, rumbling, growling roar in the bowels of the volcano under our feet. In the afternoon we met many other signs of volcanic activity. Springs of hot water bubbled from sulphur and lime-encrusted pools; sulphurous steam rose from fissures and fumeroles, and in one spot a group of splendid geysers shot their fountains of boiling water fifty feet in air. Further upward progress became impossible, and swinging westward we followed a ridge or plateau that encircled the mountain like a gigantic terrace. It was odd, I thought, that Maliche should show no fear of the volcano or of the natural phenomena, but when I questioned him, he replied that there was a similar smoking mountain near his home, and that he was familiar with such sights. But, he added, he was sure this volcano was the home of terrible gods. Had we not met the demon-god Izputeque? And at any time others might appear. But the white man's magic, the thunder and lightning from his magic tube, were more powerful than these wicked gods, and he had no fear. Brave Maliche, he was to learn all too soon how futile was the white man's "magic" to which he trusted so implicitly!

We had now circled the first volcano and had reached the pass that led between the two cones. Here there was a dense forest, the interlaced, tangled tops of the trees forming a canopy that shut out the light of the sun, and in the semi-twilight we passed onward between the giant tree trunks that rose like the fluted columns of some vast cathedral.

SOON after we entered the forest, Maliche shot a small deer, and having been on slender rations since the previous day, we stopped then and there, cooked and ate a hearty meal, and prepared to spend the rest of the afternoon and night there.

Presently Maliche rose, and mumbling that he was going on a hunt to secure food for the morrow, he vanished among the trees. It was the last time I ever saw him alive. Perhaps half an hour after he had left I was startled by a faint, far-away scream, the terrified cry of a human being, and I leaped to my feet, alert, listening, filled with fears. Then once again came the scream, suddenly cut short in a faint, choking groan. Something had happened. Maliche was in trouble! Leaping forward, dashing between the trees, I sped in the direction of the sound. Presently, I saw a lighter spot, the trees thinned, and before me stretched an open space in the forest.

At the sight that met my eyes, the blood seemed to freeze in my veins. I fairly shook with terror, and a horrified cry rose to my lips. Squatting in the center of the open space was the most monstrous, the most horrible, the most repulsive being that ever the eyes of man have looked upon.

At first sight I had thought the thing a hideous sculptured stone idol. There, fully thirty feet above the ground, was the great, misshapen, grotesque head, a head adorned with an upstanding crest of huge spikes, a head with bestial fiery red eyes, with a gaping cavernous mouth armed with immense, curved white fangs. There was the great monolithic body of dull-green, covered with intricate geometric patterns in relief. There were the crooked short arms with talons in place of fingers, and there were the columnar bowed legs, all as massive, as hard, as unreal as any sculptured Mayan god. But the illusion was only momentary. Behind the terrifying monster extended a gigantic scaly tail, the huge corpse-white paunch rose and fell as the thing breathed, the scarlet eyes moved from side to side. The stupendous, indescribably horrible

thing was alive, a creature of flesh and blood! I felt sick, faint, nauseated as my bewildered brain and horror-filled eyes took in the scene. In one gigantic front foot, clasped tightly against its chest, the monster held the body of Maliche!

Blood dripped down the livid white belly and crimson foam drooled from the huge mouth, as the fiendish thing masticated something in its titanic jaws. The next instant I realized what it was crunching between its terrible teeth. The mangled decapitated body of the Indian told the story. It was Maliche's head!

Madness, Berserk fury took the place of my fear, my horror, my nausea at the sight. For a moment I was mad, crazed, utterly bereft of reason. With a hoarse shout, a savage yell, I drew my pistol and fired at the breast of the cannibalistic demon before me. But I might as well have fired at a monument of solid rock. The bony scales of the monster's body were as impervious to my bullets as plates of steel.

Possibly he did not even feel them. But my shout, the report of my pistol, distracted his attention from his gruesome, repulsive meal. Slowly, as if trying to locate the sound, he ceased chewing, turned his head and peered towards me with one gleaming eye. At that instant I fired my last shot. I saw the baleful eye vanish in a blurr of red as my final bullet ploughed its way in, and I gave vent to a wild shout of triumph.

For an instant I thought my lucky shot had killed the monster. His head sagged, his front foot relaxed, the torn and bleeding body of Maliche dropped unheeded to the ground, and the gigantic creature swayed unsteadily.

But the next second I realized my mistake. I realized that my bullet had only momentarily stunned and confused the terrible beast. With a hoarse bellow he dropped to all fours, swung his head quickly to right and left and then, evidently locating me, he leaped with a prodigious bound directly at me. But I had already turned to run. I heard the colossal thing crash against a tree, I heard him panting, bellowing with pain and baffled rage; but I did not turn, did not glance back. Realizing even in my mad terror and my extremity that such an enormous beast would find it difficult to make speed among the trees, I dodged between the trunks, plunging deeper and deeper into the forest, paying no heed to direction.

In my rear I could still hear the monster in pursuit, crashing, hurtling into the trees, roaring hoarsely, shaking the very ground with his thundering tons of infuriated flesh. He was like a whole herd of elephants charging through the forest. Small trees went down like straws before his onrush, and only the fact that he was half-blinded and unable to see me as long as I kept to the right, and was therefore obliged to keep his head turned to avoid blundering into trees, saved me from Maliche's fate.

Even as it was, I barely held my own, barely kept my scant two hundred feet in advance of my terrible

Squatting in the center of the open space was the most monstrous, the most horrible, the most repulsive being that ever the eyes of man had looked upon

ırsuer. And each minute, each second I was growing reaker, becoming more and more spent. My breath wheezed in my throat, my lungs seemed bursting, a mist swam before my eyes. Soon I knew I must slow down, must stop. At any moment my heavy feet might trip upon a root and the next instant the terrible man-eating beast would be upon me.

Then, as I felt I must give up, as I had made up my mind to slip another cartridge into my pistol, and end my life rather than be torn to pieces, the forest came to an end and, unable to check my headway, I slipped, plunged head-first and rolled, head-over-heels down a sharp, bare slope. Dazed, frightened, my eyes blinded with dust, my mouth and nostrils filled with choking powder, dimly aware of blistering, burning heat, I brought up with a jarring, sickening thud against a mass of rock.

Bruised, shaken, sputtering, I spat the sand from my mouth, wiped the dust from my eyes and glanced about. Up from where I lay upon a ledge of rock surrounded by coarse grass and stunted trees, stretched a long steep slope of glaring white sand. Here and there slender columns of steam rose from it. Dull yellow patches of sulphur dotted its surface, and an uneven, irregular furrow marked the course of my fall. At the summit of the slope rose the forest trees and, issuing from them, was the gigantic monster still in pursuit.

But I could not move, could not make an effort to escape. I was utterly done, utterly exhausted. I felt for my pistol, but the holster was empty. In a moment more the colossal beast would come sliding, bounding upon me.

FASCINATED, I stared at him. One glance he gave about, and then, with a bound, he was on the slope. My heart seemed to stop beating, numbing terror paralyzed me. But I need not have feared. Little did I know the character of that declevity of white, innocent-appearing sand. Instead of racing down the slope, the monster sank into it as though it had been liquid. He thrashed, struggled, bellowed, lashed with his enormous tail, but all in vain. Every movement buried him deeper and deeper. The soft, fine, almost impalpable dust could not support his weight. It gave way beneath him, closed in clouds above him. It was like a quicksand, and presently only the tip of his upflung tail and the thrashing, gnashing jaws were visible.

And then an amazing phenomenon occurred. Up from the spot where he was vanishing, a great column of steam shot fifty feet in air, hissing, roaring. The next instant it subsided, and only the smooth unbroken slope remained.

And as I glanced about at my surroundings, my heart still pounding, I realized what had happened, what manner of place I had so fortunately fallen into. I was in an ancient crater; the slope down which I had slid was merely a pile of fine volcanic ash covering the boiling, steaming, heated mass below, a mere crust over an inferno. Somewhere within the depths, the carcass of the dinosaur—for such I knew the monster must have been—was being boiled to shreds. My own weight had not been sufficient to break through the surface in my swift descent; I had moved too rapidly to be badly burned by the scalding steam and hot ashes, but the monster's weight had spelled his doom. But Maliche was dead. I was alone. "My God!" I exclaimed, as a sudden realization came to me. I was in the "realm of hot ashes" of the prophecy. Was the monstrous dinosaur I had seen destroyed, the "fiend Neztpehua"?

I was convinced it was so, positive that the dinosaur had been there since the days of Kukulcan. And a strange elation, a sudden unaccountable joy thrilled me. Everything had come out precisely as it had been foretold. I had met every peril, every danger of which Katchilcan had warned me. So far, I had come unharmed through all. My way had been "made easy." Was there some unknown, some supernatural power watching over me? Was there some magic in the Book of Kukulcan? I tried to reason, tried to convince myself it was all nonsense, all superstition, all the state of my nerves, of my overtaxed muscles and brain. But I could not shake off the belief, could not argue mentally against obvious facts. So fully had the idea possessed me, that I felt absolutely convinced that I would yet come to the Cave of the Bats, to the Bridge of Life and would enter the hidden city of Mictolan.

But first, I must get out of the crater. As I have said, the spot where I had been arrested in my involuntary decent of the ash slope was rocky and was surrounded with coarse grass and a few gnarled and stunted trees. This was not surprising, for in many other active craters, especially in the West Indies—I had seen the same forms of vegetation growing in the sand and sulphur-impregnated deposits surrounded with steam and boiling water. As I rose and pressed through the thin growth—taking great care not to step into a pool of boiling water, I gave a cry of delight. Lying among the bits of rock was my revolver. Refilling its empty chambers and replacing it in the holster, I passed through the scrub, and reaching the farther side carefully surveyed the crater, searching for a passage out. I was at the bottom of an immense crater—I remember that at the time it reminded me of the titanic pit of a gigantic ant-lion, and I thanked Heaven there had been no such voracious creature lurking in the bottom to gobble me up as I came tumbling into its waiting jaws. On one side was the slope down which I had fallen and which had swallowed up the dinosaur. On two other sides there were perpendicular rocky walls seamed with golden-yellow sulphur veins, but on the fourth side the crater wall was broken down and filled with loose masses of stone between which grew red-flowered weeds, climbing cacti and coarse, brake-like ferns. It was the only passable exit, and crawling carefully over the loose and treacherous rocks, I surmounted the barrier and to my delight found that the brushy mountain side stretched unbroken to a wooded valley far below. As I moved easily down the hillside, many thoughts and conjectures filled my mind. Would I be able to sustain life without Maliche's aid? Would I—even if I reached the hidden city—ever be able to return to civilization? Of what use would it have been to have journeyed so far, to have undergone so much, to have found the city, if I spent the rest of my days here? And in that case, of what value would be my precious codex? I laughed grimly to myself as I mentally reviewed the strange events that had followed in such an unbroken chain since my visit to the little junk shop in far-off Vigo. From the moment I had seen the faded, ancient document, my entire course of life, yes, even my mental processes, had been altered. I had been bewitched, obsessed with the thing. Why hadn't I been content to dispose of it for what it would bring—a far greater sum than I had ever before possessed at one time—instead of traveling here, there and everywhere, trying to find someone to interpret it?

And why, even at the eleventh hour, hadn't I been satisfied with old Katchilcan's information and interpretation, without plunging into this wilderness on my wild-goose chase for the mythical city of Mictolan? Why? I could find no answer save that it was fate, destiny, that I had come honestly into possession of the Book of Kukulcan and had therefore to bring the long-awaited token to the Mayas in the hidden city. But in that case, why had not some other done so long before?

Surely others must have owned the codex honestly. The old shopkeeper in Vigo, for instance. I laughed heartily as I tried to picture paunchy old Don Miguel Salceda on this journey—crossing the deserts, crawling through the snake-infested tunnel, rolling down the ash-covered crater's slope, running away from a charging dinosaur.

And the dinosaur! Were there other, perhaps even more terrible prehistoric creatures in this land? I had had proof that pterodactyls and dinosaurs still survived there. Was it not possible there were others of their kinds, or even more ferocious living fossils? A Triceratops would be a most unpleasant "demon" to meet, an Iguanodon might be even worse. It behooved me to go carefully, to watch my step, to pass my nights where I would be safe from attack. And, thinking of passing the night, reminded me that the sun had set behind the peak, and that darkness was near at hand. To find a place in which to sleep would be simple—the rocks on either side of the valley were full of fissures and caves, but I was hungry and thirsty, and I could see no prospect of either water or food. Below me, to the right, the vegetation seemed greener, fresher. Possibly water was there and, meanwhile keeping a sharp watch for any possible game or even some edible berries or fruits, I hurried in the direction I had picked out. As I had hoped, a tiny stream trickled from among the rocks. A recess in a ledge formed a secure resting place, but I went supperless to bed and hunger prevented me from sleeping much that night.

THE next morning, however, I was in better luck. I came unexpectedly upon a raccoon and secured him with my pistol and, a little later, I found a huge land tortoise. I dined well, and feeling much better, swung on down the valley. To my delight I now found I had passed beyond the volcanoes, and somehow I had a feeling that I was nearing the end of my journey. I had been puzzled many times at not having found any traces of the country ever having been inhabited. There had been no signs of Indians, no ruins, no monuments, not even inscribed rocks since we had passed that great statue of Chac-mool in the pool of the crocodiles. If in the long ago the Mayas had passed this way, surely, I thought, they would have left some traces. Hardly had the thought crossed my mind when, rising above the trees ahead, I saw the remains of stone buildings. The ruins were in bad shape, the walls had fallen apart, but they were unquestionably ancient Mayan. But there was one thing about them that puzzled me. In several places were sculptured figures and symbols unlike anything I had ever seen, and in one doorway was a true arch. The Mayas, I knew, had never—as far as known—discovered the arch. They joined their walls either by "stepping in" the stones until they met, or they connected them by means of wooden beams or lintels of stone. But here was an arch, without a keystone to be sure, formed of stones cemented together, and that still remained, though the walls about it had crumbled and fallen. I had made an epochal discovery—though it was of little value to me or to the scientific world, but it whetted my desire to find the hidden city. If the ruins I was examining were the remains of the work of the people of Mictolan—as I felt sure they were—then those people had developed beyond the other Mayas and, in the many centuries that had passed since they had been separated from the rest of their race, they might have reached most astounding heights and have made most remarkable discoveries.

A little later, I came upon something that puzzled and interested me even more than the ruins with the arch. Hidden in the brush was an immense stone monument lying half buried in the earth. One portion of its upper surface was elaborately carved with beautiful bas-reliefs, but the lower portion was unmarked, and the plain surface graded evenly into the carved surface. There was every graduation from the deeply-cut sculptures to shallow carvings, from these to mere outlines, and from these to the smooth stone. And there were no signs of tool marks upon it, nothing to show that the design was being chiseled away. Eagerly I examined the other visible surfaces. They were exactly the same. It was precisely as if the immense stone column had been steel and had been dipped into some acid that had deeply etched the submerged portion, leaving the rest untouched. Of course I knew that nothing of the sort actually had occurred. I merely thought of it as an appropriate simile, but the mystery of how the Mayas accomplished their wonderful sculptures had always fascinated me, and I had never before seen, or even heard of, a column that was partly carved like this one. However, it proved the Mayas had been here, and from time to time, during several hours thereafter, I came upon other remains of the ancient race. At any time now, I thought, I might come within sight of Mictolan. Little did I dream what lay ahead of me.

CHAPTER VII

The Bridge of Light

SOON the valley became narrower and deeper, with precipitous cliffs on either side, until coming through a fairly thick wood, I found farther progress barred by a sheer cliff. But my disappointment, my chagrin at thus finding it impossible to continue on my way, was forgotten as I gazed at the rocky wall before me. Cut in the surface of the reddish rock was the huge figure of a Mayan god. So deeply sculptured was the image that it appeared more like a separate monolith set into a recess than a part of the cliff itself; a marvelous piece of work, the most superb example of ancient Mayan art that I had ever seen. The elaborate head-dress of quetzal feathers and rattlesnakes would have identified it as a representation of Kukulcan, even without the bearded face, the long robe covered with the most intricate designs, the symbols of the sacred quetzal and the two-headed serpents, and the whirling wind symbols. Fascinated, I stared at it, taking in every detail and searching for date-glyphs. But not a single cartouche enclosing numerical symbols could be seen. Then—"By Jove!" I exclaimed, as my roving eyes rested upon the oval, pendant ear ornaments. Upon them, so cleverly arranged that they appeared like mere ornamental patterns, were columns of tiny cartouches with the inscriptions for which I had been searching. But from where I stood I could make nothing of them. They were fully thirty feet above my head, and forgetting all else in my desire to examine, and if possible, decipher the dates, I clambered up the sculptured legs, and finding a foothold on the god's ceremonial staff, I grasped the arm to draw myself still farther up. As I did so, I felt the immense mass of rock sway, my feet slipped, I clutched wildly at the arm, uttered one terrified yell and fell crashing to the earth below. Dazed, stunned but luckily unhurt, I sat up and stared incredulously at the colossal image above me. Standing out at right angles to the cliff, staring down at me from directly above my head, was the huge stone face of the god, while in place of the flowing robe and sandaled feet, a black opening yawned in the face of the precipice. I gasped. The gigantic carving was movable, my weight or my touch upon the arm had swung the upper portion forward and had disclosed a hidden opening, a secret door! What did it mean?

What lay within that dark portal in the cliff? That it was something of the utmost importance, something inexpressibly sacred or precious was certain. To have carved that gigantic figure, to have designed the mechanism, to have balanced the many tons of carved stone so nicely that it could be swung at a touch must have been an herculean, a most difficult, task requiring the labor of years; a work that never would have been undertaken except for some vital, some most important purpose. And the fact that the massive pivoted door had been formed in the likeness of Kukulcan, pointed to the secrets within the opening being associated with that god. Perhaps—my pulse quickened at the thought and I felt a strange thrill—perhaps I was at the threshold of Mictolan, at the portal of the hidden city I sought!

I peered half fearfully within. All was impenetrable blackness. If I entered that mysterious chamber I would need a light, and I hurried to the nearby trees and sought for some inflammable material for a torch. I hoped to find a gum-elemi tree, but not finding this, I sought out a wax palm, gathered a quantity of the oily, waxy fruits, wrapped them tightly in the dry mast of the trunk, and had a torch that I knew would burn with a brilliant flame for two hours at least. Still, as I had no idea how long I might be within the place and no mind to be caught without a light, I prepared three of the torches. Lighting one of these I stepped—a bit hesitatingly I admit—within the entrance. But the next second I sprang back. How was I to know that the door might not close to behind me? The thing had opened to my weight or the pressure of my hand, I was not quite positive which. There might be some mechanism so arranged that, the moment I passed within, the titanic statue would swing back into place. To be trapped in that black hole would be a horrible fate, and very cautiously, very watchfully, I examined the sides of the opening, the portions of the idol both inside and outside. I could detect no mechanism, no mechanical device connected with the image. As far as I could determine, the whole huge idol was hung upon a pivot or trunnions and so balanced that the weight of a man would swing the upper portion forward.

It could be operated from the outside, but the inside was plain smooth stone with no means of swinging the image. Whoever had placed it there had not intended it to be opened from within. Yet an accident might happen. A thing so nicely balanced might swing to with a jar, even with a sudden gust of wind; certainly with an earthquake. If I wished to feel certain of having my line of retreat open, I must find some means of preventing the ponderous door from closing. This was not a difficult matter. All about were masses of rock, and by dint of hard work and blistered hands, I rolled several good-sized boulders within the opening, placed them against the inner surface of the rock about the doorway and then, to make assurance doubly sure, I dragged a large log to the doorway and placed it across the inner side of the opening. Even the immense weight of the great idol would not be enough to force the door shut with these obstacles in its way, and quite confident that I could now retrace my way at any time, I held my blazing torch aloft and stepped into the chamber. That I was in a vast natural cavern was obvious. The walls were rough and water-worn, stalagmites covered the floor, and far above my head the flare of the torch reflected faintly from pendant stalactites. The place was immense. I could see only a small part of the floor, only a small portion of the walls.

LIGHTING my way by the torch, I followed the wall to the right. I had proceeded several hundred feet when, staring from the blackness before me, I saw a pair of glowing red eyes! Beyond them were others—ten, a dozen, a whole line of glowing eyeballs, like living coals, in the darkness beyond the light of my torch. Fear gripped me. Lurking there in the shadows were wild beasts, savage creatures, perhaps—and I shivered at the thought—perhaps more of those fearsome pterodactyls, perhaps some other horrible prehistoric creatures. What a fool I had been to enter the place! In the glare of the torch I was plainly visible to the things crouching there while they were invisible to me. Even if I drew my pistol and fired at those baleful savage eyes, I could not hope to kill more than one, and there were dozens lurking there. If I turned and ran, they might be upon me. I seemed fascinated, hypnotized, unable to move. Something rustled, something was creeping stealthily along the walls! A cold chill ran up and down my back! My scalp tingled! There was a rush of air, a soft swishing sound, and some dreadful invisible thing brushed against my shoulder. I uttered a piercing shriek and leaped aside, trembling from head to foot. But the eyes still remained there, staring, fixed. They fascinated me. Unable to take my eyes from them, shaking with terror, shrinking from dread of that invisible, moving something, I took two, four, six steps forward. Then a wild, a maniacal hysterical laugh came from my lips. Ranged along the wall was a row of squat grotesque figures, their lifeless eyes set with jewels. I had been terrified at the reflection of my own torch! And yet, some living creature had touched me.

Fearfully I peered about, but all was silent as the grave. I stepped close to the images, and the next instant gasped and stood staring. The things were not idols of carved stone; they were corpses—mummies! There was no doubt about it. The dried skin, drawn tight across the skulls, the grinning jaws, the hair—all were real. Overcoming my momentary dread, my involuntary start, I stepped forward and examined them closely. Upon the heads were most elaborate crowns of feathers and golden ornaments, huge gold discs hung over the ears, upon the shriveled chests were necklaces of jade, crystal, turquoise, lapis-lazuli, carnelian and gold; the shrunken bodies were wrapped in cotton robes woven in intricate patterns. They were the mummies of ancient Mayan chiefs or priests, and unique, marvelous specimens. Before me was a fortune in gold and jewels, several fortunes if I could have transported the mummies to the outer world, where museums would have paid any price for them. But like everything else I had found, like my codex even, it was worthless to me. But other thoughts were racing through my mind as I gazed at these remains of long-dead Mayans. Was I in the tomb of the kings of Mictolan? Were the ruins I had passed all that remained of the hidden city? Or did the place still exist somewhere in the vicinity? It was all conjecture, and turning from the silent dead, I continued on my exploration of the cavern.

Presently, wondering how far I had progressed, I turned and glanced back toward the door. I could not believe my eyes, the door had vanished!

Only a few moments before it had been there, a square of light in the blackness. Now there was no sign of it. I blinked, rubbed my eyes, stared. But the opening had gone. Was it possible the statue had fallen back into place? No, I could not believe that, or I would have heard the jar, heard the crash as it struck the stones and logs I had placed as a barricade. And I felt positive that it could not have shut closely enough to blot out all light from without. And I felt equally sure that I had turned no corner, had passed no outjutting portion of the wall that might hide the opening. Possibly, I thought, one of the stalagmites, or perhaps a rock mass or pillar, in the center of the cavern might

conceal the opening. I stepped first to one side, then the other. But all was blackness; not a sign of the opening was to be seen!

WITH a tremendous effort I conquered my desire to rush madly in the direction of the door. With all my will power I forced myself to remain reasonably calm, to think, to use my brains. I reasoned with myself that the entrance must be there; that it could not have vanished without cause; that it was explicable. My only course, I told myself, was to retrace my steps, locate the mummies, follow the wall and reach the spot where I had last seen the entrance. But the next minute I realized this was impossible. I could not find the wall, could not locate the mummies! Somehow, somewhere I had got turned around, had lost my sense of direction. Wildly I sought about, here, there, everywhere. Whichever way I turned I found only vast, black empty space. I was hopelessly lost! Lost in the great cavern with the Mayan dead! And then, once more, I heard that weird swishing noise and once more that invisible ghostly hand touched me! I screamed and leaped aside. A cold soft hand passed across my face! On every side I heard whisperings, low moans, the swishing of unseen draperies, the passing of invisible bodies! I wonder I did not go mad. I shrieked, cowered, waved my flaming torch madly, threw myself on the ground. Something soft, moving, horrible fell upon my back. Madly, maniacally I grappled with it. The ghastly thing struggled in my grasp. Sharp claws tore at me. Teeth were buried in my flesh. And then I knew, and peal after peal of hysterical mad laughter echoed through the cavern. The awful things were no ghosts, no spirits. They were bats!

And with my realization of this, with the reaction of my tensed, my shattered nerves, came a flash of memory. The Cave of the Bats! Could this be it? Was this the place old Katchilcan had mentioned? Was I on the right trail? Was the end of my journey near?

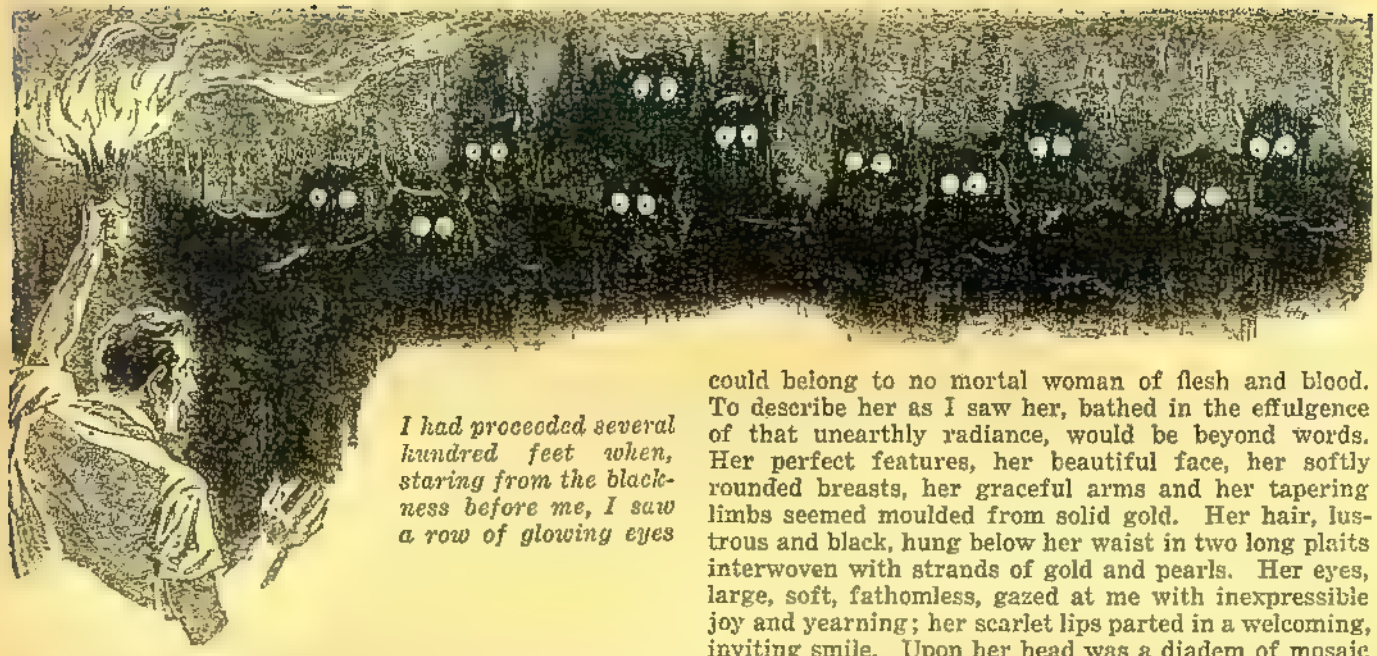
I felt sure this was the Cave of the Bats of the prophecy, and, forgetting all my fears, all my terrors, of the circling, rustling myriads of bats, forgetting even that I was lost, that the entrance had disappeared, I rose to my feet and peered about. If I were right, if this was the Cave of the Bats of Katchilcan's legend, then somewhere near at hand should be that Bridge of Light. But where, in what direction? How should I find it? One thing was certain. To stand there idle, gazing into the blackness while my torch burned out was useless. It was getting me nowhere. And, as long as I had no idea which way I had come nor which way to go, one way was as good as another. If I walked straight in any direction, I must eventually reach a wall—no cavern could be endless, and once I reached the wall I could follow along it until I came to the entrance or to some other exit, for there must be another exit, else the bats could not be here. Besides, the air was clear, sweet and fresh.

That gave me an idea. If there was a circulation of air, there must be a current, a draught. I could follow that and find the outlet. I held the torch aloft, steadying it, watching the flame and the oily smoke. Yes, there *was* a draught, the smoke drifted to one side, the flames flared in that direction. Elated, feeling sure I could find a way out, I stepped forward, stopping frequently to steady the torch and check up my direction. As I proceeded, the draught became stronger; the smoke drew ahead of me, and the flames flickered and flared. Soon I did not even have to hold the torch aloft, the sooty smoke swirling before me led me on, and I made rapid progress.

Ever about me hovered and flitted the bats; often they would brush my body, my head, even my face, but though I instinctively drew away and shuddered at their touch, yet now that I knew they were merely bats—and apparently harmless bats at that—I was not really troubled by them.

How far I followed the smoke of the torch, I do not know. Whether I walked straight, whether I turned many corners, whether I ascended or descended, I cannot say. I lost all sense of time, all sense of distance, all sense of direction. I thanked Heaven I had brought more than one torch. My first fluttered and went out. I lit a second. That, too, burned low, flickered and died. I lit the third and last, and hoped against hope that before that failed, I might find an exit from the accursed place. Terror beyond words filled me as I saw the torch burning steadily, inexorably down. One third, one half was consumed. In less than half an hour it would be finished. My fate was sealed if I did not reach an opening, light, within the next thirty minutes. Strange, incongruous, confused thoughts filled my mind while my feet hurried me on. All that had transpired since I had landed at Vigo passed before my vision like a moving picture. I saw the little quay with the red-sailed fishing smacks moored beside it, the rocky hillside with the tall, square houses, the lounging, red-sashed, beretted boatmen; the Avenida with its stream of motor cars and creaking wine carts; the little Plazuela de Tres Santos. The image of paunchy, tousel-headed, greasy Salceda rose before me. As in a dream I saw myself haggling with him over the old books, heard his suave, flowery words, even smelled the odor of garlic that exuded from him. In the flickering torch and swirling smoke I seemed to see the figures, the strange symbols of the mysterious codex. In turn I visualized the squat, massive, smoke-blackened British Museum, Doctor Joyce with his trim gray Vandyke beard; New York with its thunder of traffic, its roar, its skyscrapers; the great plaza of Mexico; Cervantes bending above my codex, his keen black eyes gleaming with interest, his swarthy face alight. Before me, like a wraith in the glare of my torch, I again saw jolly-faced, rotund Fray José. I passed like a disembodied spirit through the little Mayan village and heard Katchilcan's droning voice relating the ancient prophecy in the soft guttural Zutugil. As plainly as though it were actually before my eyes, I saw the nude body of the Indian girl, charred and seared upon the altar of the temple on the mountain. I seemed to feel the bonds cutting into my flesh, to see the flash of Maliche's upraised obsidian knife. Then the terrible cañon, the Valley of Death, the horrible Tunnel of Serpents, the nightmarish Pool of the Alligators.

Again, in my strangely disordered mind, I traversed the scorching, glaring deserts; in my ears rang the unearthly cry of the great pterodactyl. I shuddered as the vision of the awful dinosaur with Maliche's headless body in his talons rose before me. All had come to pass; all that the prophecy had foretold, all that was written and pictured in the Book of Kukulcan had been borne out, and now I was in the Cave of the Bats, was racing onward, following the streaming smoke of my last torch. No doubt it was the hypnotic effect of gazing steadily at the light that produced the visions; yet I was not dreaming. I was fully awake. One portion of my brain was normal, living in the present, alive to my dangers, to the rapidly diminishing torch; the other half seemed detached, moving back through time, seeing each and every detail of all that I had passed through. I can compare it only to that period between wakefulness and sleep when one dreams impossible things yet knows that one is dreaming. And so thoroughly aware was I that the mental visions were not realities that when I saw a strangely greenish wavering light, I felt it was a part of the phantasma.



I had proceeded several hundred feet when, staring from the blackness before me, I saw a row of glowing eyes

BUT the next moment I knew it was no vision. About me the cavern was bathed in a peculiar glow, a soft light that seemed to change from green to blue, to purple, to pink, to red, to yellow—to pass through every color of the spectrum exactly like the lights thrown upon the curtain of a theatre by multicolored electric lights. With a sharp cry, as the last flicker of the torch burned my fingers, I cast it aside. No need of it now. I could see plainly. The cavern had narrowed. The roof was barely ten feet above my head, the walls were within reach of my outstretched hands. I was in a tunnel, and before me, streaming through a semi-circular opening, was the remarkable prismatic glow.

I was safe. I had found an exit. Before me was the open air. I dashed forward towards the opening, gave a horrified yell and checked myself in the nick of time. Beyond the opening yawned a vast, black, fathomless abyss!

Another foot and I would have plunged to death in its awful depths. I shuddered and clung to the rocks as I gazed into it. Still trembling at my narrow escape, I looked up. Above my head the walls rose for hundreds, thousands of feet, until they seemed to meet. To right and left the stupendous precipices joined. It was a vast chasm, a bottomless crevice in the bowels of the mountain, and I was as effectively trapped as though I were still within the vast black cavern.

Yet, I scarcely noticed these things, I hardly realized the predicament I was in, for the marvelous inexplicable phenomena that confronted me held all my attention, all my thoughts. Across the vast rift from where I stood, perhaps two hundred feet distant, was a second opening in the precipice, and from below this, streaming across the chasm as though projected from some titanic searchlight, was a great beam of vari-colored light that shimmered, flashed with rainbow hues, and glowed with transcending beauty. It seemed almost like a solid thing, like a giant beam of transparent iridescent glass spanning the chasm. It was the most marvelous sight I had ever seen.

As I gazed upon it fascinated, forgetting all else, filled with awe and admiration, I gaped and stared with incredulous, unbelieving eyes. Outlined in the opposite opening, seeming to materialize from the light, appeared a woman!

Every detail of her face, her figure, her garments was clearly outlined. And as I gazed at her, feeling that she was a vision, a figment of my overtaxed brain, I drew a sharp short breath, for surely such beauty could belong to no mortal woman of flesh and blood. To describe her as I saw her, bathed in the effulgence of that unearthly radiance, would be beyond words. Her perfect features, her beautiful face, her softly rounded breasts, her graceful arms and her tapering limbs seemed moulded from solid gold. Her hair, lustrous and black, hung below her waist in two long plaits interwoven with strands of gold and pearls. Her eyes, large, soft, fathomless, gazed at me with inexpressible joy and yearning; her scarlet lips parted in a welcoming, inviting smile. Upon her head was a diadem of mosaic in turquoise, rubies and pearls. Her only garment was a skirt of soft, semi-transparent cloth richly embroidered with gold and bordered with feather work in red, white and green. Upon her tiny feet were sandals fastened with golden lacings, and about her slender neck was a golden chain bearing a jewelled pendant that rested in the curve of her breasts and rose and fell and flashed like living fire as she breathed.

For a moment she stood there, her wonderful eyes fixed upon me, compelling, seeming almost to speak. Then lifting her arms, she held them towards me. A madness raced through my veins. My temples throbbed. I longed to throw myself into those outstretched arms, to hold her close, to pour passionate words of love into her ear, to crush her lips with kisses. But hundreds of feet of abyss lay between us; we were as far apart as though we had been on separate planets. Her lips moved. Her words—soft, musical, imploring, floated to me, though they were unintelligible to my ears. I suffered, as I stood there, overwhelmed with love, with longing for that wondrous being calling to me, beckoning to me from across that awful chasm.

And then, with a little gesture of despair, with a contemptuous toss of her head, she stepped forward, stepped over the verge of that terrible chasm! I was too horrified, too overcome, too numbed with the horror of it, to utter a sound.

Then my horror changed to wonder, to incredulous, inexpressible amazement. The girl had not fallen, had not plunged downward to a fearful death. She was floating through air, coming towards me. Could it be possible, could it be real? She was walking upon that beam of light!

Was I dreaming? Had I gone mad? Was it a delusion, a vision of my brain? The next moment she was beside me, and as I seized her in my arms, and felt the pressure of her warm palpitating body, and pressed kisses upon her unresisting lips, and her soft arms stole about my neck, I knew that it was no vision, no dream. She, at least, was very real.

CHAPTER VIII

The Hidden City

VERY gently she drew herself from my embrace and spoke; to my surprise and delight, using a dialect of Zutugil, and fervently I thanked heaven—and Fray José—that I had learned that tongue.

"My lord has been long in coming," she said. "Long

have we awaited my lord. For many Tuns and Katuns, aye, even for many Baktuns, have the maidens of Kinich Ahau awaited thy coming at the Bridge of Light."

Bridge of Light! At her words comprehension dawned upon me. Strange I had not thought of it before—in Zutugil, light and life were synonymous, the same word served for both—the bridge of life of the prophecy was the bridge of light the girl had crossed!

"But to me, Itza, has come the honor of welcoming my lord," she continued, "and blessed by the gods am I. And"—she dropped her eyes and blushed—"I am glad to find you good to look upon, my lord. I had thought to see my lord ugly—even with the savage face and great teeth of the images, and at times I feared and thought perchance my lord might even suck my blood or devour me, as Kinchi Haman says the gods are wont to do. But my lord is kind and gentle and he honors and blesses me with caresses, and"—her golden skin flushed rosily and her eyelids drooped—"and, the caresses of my lord are very sweet." . . .

At last, with a deep sigh, she again released herself. 'We must go to Kinchi Haman, my lord," she said. "He would be angry indeed if he knew I were detaining my lord. Let us delay no longer."

Holding my hand, she led me towards the chasm. But as I glanced into the terrible abyss spanned by that shimmering beam of light, I drew back. There are limits to human faith, to credulity, and though I had seen Itza walk safely across the Bridge of Light, and though I knew she was no wraith, no spirit, no supernatural being, no figment of my imagination, yet to believe that I could do the same was utterly beyond me. By what magic, by what mysterious unknown power she had accomplished the seemingly impossible feat I did not know, could not imagine, but that the streaming light would support *my* weight was unthinkable, utterly preposterous.

Itza looked at me with surprise in her glorious eyes. "Does my lord fear?" she asked. Then, with a merry rippling laugh: "Fear not to follow me, my lord," she said, and stepped forward. I gasped, took a step forward to restrain her, but she was out of reach, walking upon that multicolored light, leaving me alone within the entrance to the cavern. Better to be dashed to my death than to lose Itza, and fully expecting to feel myself hurtling through space, I leaped after her.

Miracle of miracles! My feet trod upon an invisible something as firm as the rock itself. In a moment I was at Itza's side. In a moment more we had crossed the chasm and stood within the opening in the opposite cliff. I had crossed the Bridge of Light, had accomplished the utterly impossible!

In impassioned words, with husky voice I told her of my love, whispered soft Zutugil endearments in her ears and declared, as I believed and as I still believe, that Fate had drawn me hither and Destiny had guided and guarded me that I might find and have her. "And I, too, love thee, my lord," she whispered. "Aye, I love thee more than life. Blessed am I above all women that my lord should love me, but mortal woman cannot mate with the sons of the gods, my lord, and Kinchi Haman has chosen me to be the bride of Kinich Ahau with the coming of the next moon of the Tonalmatl."

"Curse your Kinchi Haman, whoever he may be!" I exclaimed. "I'll have something to say about whose bride you are to be, my Itza, my beloved one! And as for being a son of the gods! I am as much a mortal as thyself."

Itza drew away, her eyes frightened, wide. "Hush!" she warned me in a terrified whisper. "Curse not the great high-priest, my lord. And say not that you are mortal. Aye, I know you come in the form of man, for so it has been foretold, but even Kukulcan walked the earth in the form of man and thou, my lord, art his son. But we must make haste, my lord. Already the sun seeks the nether world, so let us hurry onward to my people and to Kinchi Haman."

Still holding my hand, she led me down the rocky passage, while all about us the strange light glowed. Whence it came I could not discover. I could see no device, no contrivance, no source to account for the light. Even where it streamed across the chasm, where it formed that miraculous bridge of light, it seemed to issue from the solid rock. It was all incomprehensible, incredible. The only real, natural, understandable thing I had seen was Itza, and while she was real and natural and lovable enough, yet even some of her words were incomprehensible to me. That she had mistaken me for a god, for the descendant of the Plumed-Serpent, was not surprising. She and her people, of course, knew of the ancient prophecy, they had—as she herself had said—been long awaiting the appearance of some messenger bearing the token, the symbol of the Book of Kukulcan, and when she had seen me, a white man and bearded, she had naturally thought me either the bearded god himself or one of his sons. But who was this high-priest Kinchi Haman whom she both revered and feared? Who was this Kinich Ahau, whom she was to wed at the next new cycle of Tomalmatl? Well, I'd soon know, and would have something to say about whom she was to wed. And if Itza's people looked upon me as an incarnated god, as the son of Kukulcan, what I had to say would carry weight. Even a high-priest would hardly dare defy the son of the Plumed Serpent, the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan. And even if he did, I'd have Itza for myself despite him and his fellows. If it came to a matter of force, I was quite prepared to slay the priest with my own hands. So elated was I, so filled with my new found happiness, so overwhelmingly in love with Itza, that no thought of danger; no thought of failure entered my mind. I felt able to cope with anything, to overcome anything, to defy the world if necessary. Nothing mattered but Itza, and I drew her to me and kissed her head, her neck, her upturned lips as we hurried on.

But even in my obsession I noted something of our surroundings. I saw that the tunnel through which we were passing had been cut by hand—tool marks were everywhere visible upon the walls and roof, and at frequent intervals the rock was covered with sculptured figures and glyphs. In places, too, it led downwards in series of steps, and descending one of these flights of stone stairs and turning sharply to the left, we came abruptly to the end of the passage with an arched opening framing a section of a gorgeous sunset, of golden and crimson clouds above a purple range of lofty mountains.

AS we reached the opening, and I gazed upon the scene spread before me, I uttered an involuntary cry of admiration. Never had I beheld a more beautiful picture. Enclosed within an encircling ring of towering mountains was a valley perhaps thirty miles in diameter, a valley rich and verdant, with patches of dark woodland, with lush green meadows, and with a broad tranquil river winding through the centre and shimmering in the fading light of the setting sun. Fields of golden-yellow corn, or snowy cotton, of tobacco, alternated with acres of flowers—crimson, white, pink, mauve and scarlet, until the cultivated lands looked like a vast multicolored crazy-quilt. In every direction straight roads, bordered by stone walls and shade trees, divided the whole valley into even, symmetrical squares, and from where we stood, a broad highway led—

straight as an arrow—to the great city that occupied the very centre of the valley. It was the hidden city, the city of Mictolan!

Hundreds of low, one-storied houses glowed in the rosy light of the sunset. Here and there a taller, more imposing building rose above the others; four magnificent temples with enormous, intricate roof-combs towered, on their lofty pyramidal mounds, far above the lesser buildings, and even higher than these, surmounting an enormous "kus" or pyramid fully two hundred feet in height, with its gleaming, painted comb soaring another hundred feet in air, was a magnificent temple rising from the huge open plaza in the centre of the city.

From where we stood, we could see the tiny forms of people moving about; strolling through the streets, lolling on the flat roofs of their houses, plodding from their labors in the fields towards thatched cottages embowered in flowering shrubs and trees, but all so silent, so still, that it seemed more like a picture thrown upon a screen than a reality. And as the last light of the sun faded and was gone, and twilight descended on the valley, a strange effulgence, a luminous glow overspread the city and the valley, seeming to come from nowhere, to be conjured from the air, and bathing the wondrous scene in a soft, mysterious light.

Itza's touch drew my eyes from the marvelous scene, and again I crushed her to me, drank deep of the sweetness of her lips and felt the thrill of her responsive love. Then, side by side, we stepped from the opening in the mountain and, in the strange, soft purplish light, moved forward along the highway towards the city. Our presence was already noted. Before we had gone fifty feet, the faint, far-away sound of horns, of booming drums, of shouting voices were borne to us from the city, and from the summits of the five temples lambent flames shot to the zenith, shifting from gold to white, to red, to green, like a display of the Aurora. Ahead of us the wide road was filled with hurrying, thronging, shouting people. Men, women and children came dancing, laughing towards us. All were golden-skinned, all were clad in richly woven cotton garments, all were figures that might have stepped bodily from some ancient Mayan sculpture. Prostrating themselves as we approached, strewing the road with gorgeous flowers, chanting songs, they formed a lane through which we passed. Now and then I caught a word, a sentence, amid the confusion of shouts, laughter and songs: "He comes! The bearer of the symbol comes!" "Look upon the son of Kukulcan!" "Beseech his blessings!" "Itza leads him to us!" "Blessed by the gods is Itza!" "Our day is at hand!" "Behold the deliverance of Mictolan!" "Welcome to thee, O son of the Plumed Serpent!" "Great is our rejoicing O, our lord!" "Long have we awaited thee, but thou hast come at last!" "Lo, the prophecy has been fulfilled!" Then, as we passed where the crowd was still closer, I heard someone exclaim: "May he who bears the token choose Itza for his bride!"

"Hush! speak not so," warned another. "Know you not she is betrothed to Kinich Ahau? She weds at the coming of Tonalmatl."

"And what of that?" persisted the first speaker, and at his words my heart went out to him and I stared into the sea of faces striving to identify him—a tall serious-looking young fellow in a dark red costume and a plumed golden casque—"What of that?" he repeated. "Who dares say the bearer of the token nay? Can aught prevail against the power of the lord of Kukulcan?" The reply was lost as we passed on and the welcoming din increased. Never had a man a more vociferous, a more whole-hearted, a more triumphant welcome.

Itza touched my arm. "Look, my lord!" she exclaimed in a whisper. "He comes, Kinchi Haman comes forth to welcome my lord. My task is done, my lord. I must leave thee. But O, my lord, that I might be forever at thy side! Oh, but thy caresses are very sweet, my lord!"

I grasped her almost roughly by the arm. "Go not!" I commanded her. "Your tasks are but just commenced. I, too, desire you forever at my side, and none—no, not even your Kinchi Haman, dare dispute the commands of him who bears the token of Kukulcan."

A troubled, half-frightened expression came over her face but she smiled and glanced trustfully at me and made no further effort to leave my side as we halted and awaited the approaching procession. In the lead, clearing the street of the crowds, and forcing them back by means of heavy wooden staves, were several dozen Indians clad only in loin cloths but wearing tight-fitting leather caps adorned with blue feathers. Behind these marched several columns of warriors in robes of quilted cotton, their heads covered with shining copper helmets bearing nodding plumes of red, white and green. Each carried a long bronze-headed lance and a round shield decorated with mosaic symbols of the Plumed Serpent. Following these was a band playing upon double-ended drums, long reed pipes and pottery whistles, while behind the musicians was a knot of long-robed, long-haired men ablaze with gold and jewelled ornaments and surrounding a marvelous litter borne on the shoulders of eight men. Even in the soft subdued light which resembled bright moonlight, the palanquin scintillated and sparkled with iridescent hues as though sprinkled with diamond dust. But at the time I scarcely glanced at the golden, gem-encrusted litter, for my eyes were fixed upon the man who sat within it—the high-priest of Mictolan, Kinchi Haman.

NEVER have I seen a more repugnant, a more repulsive creature. He seemed a fiend in human form if ever there was one, and he was scarcely human at that. His face was indescribably horrible, for some affection or disease had eaten away the cheeks and nose until the jaw bones were visible; he had the appearance of a living death's head. Above the yawning black holes that should have been a nose, his malignant eyes burned in deep bony sockets. A shock of coarse hair, dyed red by lye, grew low on his artificially flattened forehead and hung about his shoulders, and although I did not know it at the time, he was a hunchback with weak bowed legs and gorilla-like arms. He was dressed in a long robe of black with a border of symbols in the sacred red, white and green, an immense carved emerald was suspended by a chain of heavy gold links about his neck and upon his head was a narrow gold band bearing two long tail feathers of the sacred Quetzal trogan.

As he saw Itza beside me, his eyes flashed, his lips drew back over the fleshless jaws and he was the personification of fury.

"Back to your home, Daughter of Kinich Ahau, he snarled. "How dare ye walk in the presence of him who comes, shameless one that thou art?"

Itza, terror on her face, shrank back, but I tightened my hold on her arm. "Have no fear, beloved," I whispered.

The priest seemed mad with fury as he saw the girl make no move to obey. "You dare defy me?" he screamed, half-rising from his litter, and quivering with rage. "Have a care that thou art not flayed alive and wed in blood to Xipe instead of becoming the bride of Kinich Ahau." Then, turning to his soldiers, "seize her, beat her until she falls," he ordered.

Two of the men stepped forward, their stern faces a strange mingling of fear of approaching me, the bearer of the token, and terror of disobeying the monstrous, fiendish priest.

"Stand back!" I ordered, drawing Itza to my side. "He who dares lay hand upon the maiden Itza dies by the curse of Kukulcan."

Instantly the warriors drew hastily back, and still holding Itza, trembling and terrified, I strode directly toward the raging, infuriated priest. My part was to bluff, to overawe. From the instant I had set eyes upon Kinchi Haman I had known that he and I were fated to clash, that either his power or mine must prevail and there was no better time than the present to determine once and for all who was to wield the power. My part was to overawe, to bluff to terrify by my supposedly semi-divine personality. But would the priest's fears of offending the gods override his vicious, cruel nature and his fear of losing prestige? I would soon know.

Looking him contemptuously up and down and then with a savage frown staring straight into his bloodshot, wicked eyes, I stepped to within a yard of where he sat, like the living counterpart of a hideously distorted idol.

"And who art thou to defy the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan?" I demanded. "A strange welcome you give the bearer of the sacred token, O, Kinchi Haman. Know you, misshapen one, that I, the long expected one, choose to have this maiden Itza remain beside me. More, O, priest of Mictolan, I, not Kinich Ahau, shall wed the maiden. Disobey my wishes, little priest, and the lightning and thunder at my command shall destroy you and your people."

At my words, a deep half-moan, half-sigh arose from the crowd. They, through their priest, had offended the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan. Dire vengeance might fall upon them at any moment, and with groans and supplications they prostrated themselves upon the earth. But the effect of my words upon the priest were very different. He was a brave man, despite his cruel, vindictive nature, and, so I suspected at least, was not as superstitious as his people. And though I could see he was terrified at heart and recoiled before me, yet he was not one to willingly acknowledge defeat so readily.

"Thou speakest boldly," he muttered, his eyes ablaze, "but what proof have we that thou art the bearer of the token? And even if thou art, it is I, Kinchi Haman who rules here. And the maiden I say is to wed Kinich Ahau." Then to his guard. "Seize her, I command you. The one who falters dies the seven deaths."

A burly fellow sprang towards Itza at the priest's words. There was no time for argument, no time for anything but instant action. I must prove my words, must make good my boast. I drew my revolver, fired from the hip, and the soldier plunged forward. But his fall was scarcely noticed by the amazed, horror-stricken, terrified people. Screams, yells, groans came from them as they grovelled in the dust while the priest, flinging himself from his litter, threw himself at my feet chattering incomprehensible gibberish and pleading for mercy.

I had won the day. To be sure it had been at the cost of a man's life and I regretted having been forced to kill the fellow who was, after all, only obeying the priest's orders, but it could not be helped and, I felt, it had probably saved many lives (including Itza's and my own) that would have been sacrificed had I not at once asserted myself.

PLACING my foot upon the neck of the prostrate priest—a somewhat theatrical pose I admit, but perfectly appropriate under the circumstances—I harangued the people. Timidly, fearfully they raised their heads at sound of my voice, and with frightened eyes gazed at me, fairly trembling with terror of another demonstration of my power over thunder and lightning.

"People of Mictolan!" I cried, "Arise and fear not. I, the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan come to you in peace and friendship. Bear witness O, People of Mictolan, that Kinchi Haman defied him who brings the token, and behold him humbled and in the dust. He has been spared death by the magic of my thunder and my lightning because he is of the priesthood of Kinich Ahau, but no other shall be spared who defies me, and even he will feel the vengeance of Kukulcan if he bows not to my will. And bear witness O, People of Mictolan that the maiden Itza weds with me and not with Kinich Ahau. Should ill befall her, should harm come to her, the vengeance of the Plumed Serpent will fall upon the city and its people."

A great sigh arose from the throng. "Thy will is law, O, son of Kukulcan. Thy words shall be obeyed," they chanted, almost as with one voice.

"Arise, Kinchi Haman," I ordered the still groveling priest, removing my foot. "You have heard my words. Bear them well in mind, O, Most Ugly One."

Shaking, terrified, the priest managed to gain his feet, but despite his physical—and his superstitious fear—malignant hatred and vindictiveness were in his burning deep-set eyes. But his words were humble, apologetic, as he begged pardon for defying me.

"You asked, O, priest, what proof you had that I was the bearer of the symbol," I said. "Is not my presence here enough? Who, but the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan, could pass the Valley of Death, the Tunnel of the Serpents, the Pool of the Alligators, the Eight Deserts, the Whirlwind, the Fiend Neztpehua, the Demon Ixputeque, the Blazing Mountains, the Realm of Hot Ashes, the Cave of the Bats and the Bridge of Light? But that none may doubt, here O, priest, is further proof."

As I spoke, I handed him the copy of the codex. Every neck craned forward, every breath was held as the priest studied the document. Dropping to his knees, he knocked his forehead in the dust. "O, great and mighty son of Kukulcan!" he cried, as he again arose. "Son of the mighty Gucumatz, Lord of the Thunder and the Heavens, we do you homage. At thy feet we prostrate ourselves and our gods bow before you. Thy will is law and thy breath our life. Great is our rejoicing that thou hast come unto us of Mictolan at last. Mighty will be our praise to Kinich Ahau, Lord of the Sun, for thy coming, and great will be the sacrifices on our altars. One hundred maidens shall be wed to Kinich Ahau on the moon of the Tonalmatl, and——"

"Stop!" I ordered, interrupting him. "There will be no sacrifices. Know ye not that Kukulcan in the long ago ordered that the people of Xibalba, the Kingdom of the Great Snake, were to make no sacrifices of their fellow men? Know ye not that it was disobedience of this order that caused Kukulcan to leave you, to hide his face for many Baktuns; that in punishment, the people were destroyed and only those of the City of Mictolan were saved? And yet you, O, Kinchi Haman, would disobey that order, and that in the presence of the son of Kukulcan! Have a care that the vengeance of the Lord of Thunder falls not upon thy head, O, priest."

He glowered. I saw that in him I had an implacable enemy. But he was too fearful of my pistol, too fearful of my presence openly to protest, too fearful of popular opinion. Though he cursed me inwardly, for he was a cruel and bloodthirsty old rascal, yet his words were suave and humble enough. "It shall be as my lord wishes," he declared. "He is the son of Kukulcan; he is our master and the gods bow to his will. But my Lord tires, he has come far. His place is awaiting him

as it has been awaiting him for many Katuns in the past. Come, my Lord, to thy temple that thou mayest rest."

Turning, he beckoned to his litter bearers who came forward with his gorgeous, golden, gem-encrusted palanquin, and with it another even more wonderful which had been brought for my own use. With a quick motion I lifted Itza, seated her in the glorious vehicle, and took my place by her side. Never have I seen a more hideous, a more intense expression of hatred and anger than that which, for a brief instant, showed upon the death's head features of the high priest as he saw the girl beside me in the litter.

"You and I are coming to grips soon, old rascal," I muttered to myself, as the bearers lifted my litter to their shoulders and started forward. "And," I added mentally, "the sooner you start trouble, the sooner your career will be finished, you old faker," for I felt quite certain that Kinchi Haman did not in the least believe me a divinity.

CHAPTER IX

The Prince Aczopil

RECLINING on robes of the most magnificent feather-work, within the litter of carved wood covered with gold plates and mosaic work of precious stones, Itza and myself were borne upon the shoulders of gorgeously-clad nobles, while on every side the throngs cheered, shouted welcomes, threw flowers before and upon us and, falling into line in our rear, formed a colorful, noisy procession. Before us rode the high-priest in his litter, with the warrior guard and band leading the way towards the central plaza and the great temple. As we passed slowly along, I was filled with intense scientific interest. The people, their costumes, the litter I was in were all so strange, so marvelous that I could scarcely realize it was real. Then there was that strange, diffused, inexplicable light that illuminated the valley; the still stranger multicolored lambent beams that emanated from the temples. What was it? How was it produced? And what weird, mysterious, impossible light was that upon which Itza and I had crossed the chasm? It was utterly beyond me, wholly inexplicable, and I determined that my first care would be to investigate these phenomena.

Then I beheld another wonder. From the distance, as I had looked upon the valley in the light of the last rays of the setting sun, I had seen fields of maize, of potatoes, of vegetables and of flowers. There had seemed nothing unusual about them. But now, as we passed through a field, I gazed in utter astonishment. The maize was fully fifteen feet in height; I saw a melon as large as a barrel, and every vegetable and flower was of equally gigantic proportions. Never had eyes of man seen such stupendous vegetable growths. Here, by some means, agriculture had accomplished miracles. Many of the ripening ears of corn were more than two feet in length with each kernel nearly an inch in diameter, and sweet potatoes, lying upon the earth where they had been freshly dug, were as large as my body. What had caused such results? Was it due to the light, to the fact that there was no night here? I did not know, but later I discovered that this was primarily the cause, although the quality of the light and its origin had much to do with it. By this time we were at the plaza, a large open space bordered with immense trees and flowering shrubs above which the vast pile of the temple towered toward the zenith. Thrice around the base of the mighty stone-faced *Kus* we were carried, and then up another broad avenue. Between rows of splendid buildings, all typically Mayan except for the fact that many had arched doorways, the procession moved slowly towards an imposing, elaborately sculptured edifice which was evidently a palace.

Here our litters were lowered to the ground, and the hideous, hunchbacked, skeleton-jawed priest, with many obeisances and elaborate words of welcome, which were belied by his smouldering, vengeful eyes and savage expression, bade me enter, informing me that it was to be my home. Itza, trembling and hesitating, held back as the priest glared at her; but fearing to let her leave me for an instant, I drew her with me into the palace. It was a magnificent building, its outer walls a marvel of sculpture, its inner walls covered with marvelous frescoes of gods, heroes, priests, semi-human personages, beasts, reptiles and symbols, the whole combined in such a manner as to produce a symmetrical design very different from anything I had ever seen. Everywhere, however, the sacred red, white and green of the Plumed Serpent cult predominated, and everywhere Kukulcan in all his manifold forms and symbols appeared in the sculptures and frescoes. Even the portal, flanked with two immense stone columns carved to represent conventionalized serpents with feathered bodies, indicated that the palace was dedicated to the serpent-god, and as I passed through the first great chamber I felt quite sure that the place had been erected, ages before, to provide a home for the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan when he arrived. Flowers were everywhere; from incense burners of solid gold and silver, sweet-scented smoke arose, and from an inner room came the sounds of low music and of singing. Forming a lane through which we walked, were several dozen young girls who smiled and threw flowers before us, and passing through a second doorway we entered a large room. Here feather robes, skins, rush mats and great cushions were upon the floor. Upon a low table were immense fruits; grim, armed guards in golden casques and breastplates stood about the walls; men, evidently servants or slaves, stood about, and from a huge golden bowl a most appetizing odor arose. Not until then did I fully realize how hungry I was. I had had nothing to eat for nearly thirty hours, but the excitement of the day and evening had driven all thoughts of food from my mind. But now I felt famished, and throwing myself upon a pile of robes and cushions with Itza beside me, I ate ravenously of the thick stew that was served in deep silver dishes.

The high priest, explaining that he had religious duties to attend to, had withdrawn, but there was little privacy, for nobles, officials and other prominent personages came and went, bringing presents, paying homage and welcoming the supposed son of Kukulcan. Among these I noticed the young man to whom I had been attracted earlier in the evening because of his remark regarding Itza and myself. Pointing him out to the girl, I asked her who he was.

"He is the Prince Aczopil, my lord," she replied. "But for Kinchi Haman he would be the king of Mictolan. When our good king Tutil-Nima died, two Tuns past, Kinchi Haman declared himself both king and priest."

Instantly I realized that in the deposed prince I would find a true friend and ally, for from the few words he had spoken, and which I had overheard, and from what Itza told me, I felt sure the Prince Aczopil was no friend of the high priest. And if he had a household and wife or sisters, it might solve my problem as to what to do with Itza, until I could consummate our marriage. She could not well remain with me in the palace—although she had expressed her willingness to do so and saw nothing out of place in doing so, and I had no intention of allowing her to return to the home of the maidens of Kinich Ahau, the Vestal Virgins of

the temple, where she would be in the power of the rascally old priest.

"And is the Prince Aczopil married?" I asked Itza, "Has he sisters or a mother?"

"Yes, my lord," she replied. "He is wed with the Princess Tutuil and he dwells with his sister, the Princess Mitchi Ina."

MY mind was made up. I beckoned to the Prince, who was now near. "Greetings Prince of Mictolan," I exclaimed, as, somewhat hesitatingly and evidently overwhelmed at being so honored, he approached. "To the son of King Tutuil Nima the son of Kukulcan gives welcome as to a brother. You shall be my counsellor and friend, and into the care of you and of the Princess Tutuil and the Princess Mitchi Ina I give the maiden Itza, until such time as she shall be my wife. Look to it, O Prince, that no harm befalls her, and guard her as you would your life."

Never have I seen a man so overcome with mingled surprise and delight. To his mind he was, of course, being favored by a divine being, by the son of Kukulcan, and had been honored above all others—not even excepting the high priest in the city. Just as I had instinctively known that in Kinchi Haman I had an implacable enemy, so I knew that in the Prince Aczopil I had a staunch friend, a man whom I could depend upon and who, no doubt, had a vast amount of power and influence among the inhabitants, even though he was not officially their ruler. Falling upon his knees before me he poured out a torrent of words of gratitude and pledged himself and all his family to guard and protect Itza.

She, poor girl, was almost heartbroken at being forced to leave me even for the night; but she had no fear as she trusted Aczopil implicitly and after an affectionate farewell, I gave her into the Prince's care. Then having managed to dismiss all my visitors and my far too numerous attendants, I threw myself upon the soft rugs and cushions and instantly fell into a dreamless sleep.

The following day I was up betimes, having been awakened by the servants moving about, and had scarcely finished my breakfast before the old priest put in his appearance. He seemed much more affable than on the preceding evening and, to my relief, made no inquiries as to the whereabouts of Itza, though I had no doubt that he knew all that had happened. The servants and my attendants were all of his choosing, and unquestionably kept him advised of my every move and word. But I intended to change that very soon and to surround myself with men and women loyal to Prince Aczopil. Neither was I hoodwinked by Kinchi Haman's assumed friendliness. He could not hide the expression of his eyes nor the tone of his voice, though I could hardly blame him for feeling peeved and far from friendly towards me. I had defied him, had humbled him before his people. I had forbidden him to hold human sacrifices though I much doubted if he had obeyed me in that matter; I had raised the deposed prince to a place of high honor, and I had robbed him of Itza. Had I actually been divine or the descendant of Kukulcan, this might not have troubled him over much, for to be superseded by a divinity or semi-divinity would have been expected. But somehow, from the moment he had defied me, I had felt sure he was aware that I was mortal and an alien. Despite his horrible appearance, due to his mutilations and deformities, he was keen and intelligent, as well as crafty.

While he did not dare incur the danger of bringing down the wrath of his people by denouncing me as an imposter, though he had to acknowledge that I possessed the symbol and had come unscathed through all the perils as was foretold in the prophecy; though he was in mortal dread of my seemingly magic control of thunder and lightning, yet, aside from his natural superstitions and perhaps some lingering doubts, he was convinced that I was not all I represented myself to be. Had he felt otherwise, he would never have acted as he had. He would have prostrated himself before me; he would have welcomed me and would have bowed without question to my commands. Why or how his suspicions had been aroused I do not know; but on this first morning, as he conversed and asked veiled questions, I knew perfectly well that he was endeavoring to confirm his suspicions. Fortunately I knew the ancient prophecy, as related by old Katchilcan, by heart, and I took the opportunity of referring to it as we talked. But I dreaded that he might produce a codex or some form of writing for me to read. And when he asked abruptly how soon I would lead his people forth from the valley of Mictolan, as provided for in the Book of Kukulcan, I was in a decided jam.

In the first place I had no intention of fulfilling this part of the contract. In the second place, even had I desired to do so, it would not have been feasible, and would surely have resulted in suffering and death, for the Mayas would have been utterly at a loss in the outside world. No doubt, when Kukulcan (for I was now as firm a believer in the Plumed Serpent as was any Maya) had segregated the people in the hidden city and had foretold that they would one day come forth and repossess the land, he had expected that they would increase and multiply enormously and that there would be only a handful of enemies to overcome. But for some reason the population increased little, if at all. There were, I judged, not more than ten thousand inhabitants at the most—and that particular portion of the prophecy had been set at naught. However I had no intention of telling the old priest that. Whether I was a divinity or not, I had come—according to his belief and the belief of the people—as the promised messenger to lead the Mictolans forth to regain their lost power and their lost lands. My only play was to procrastinate and delay, to find some plausible excuse for remaining in the city, until I could slip off with Itza.

This plan of procedure had not occurred to me before, and for a moment I was in a quandary. But my mind worked quickly and I doubt if Kinchi Haman even noticed my hesitancy. There were many things to be done before the people left Mictolan, I told him. I had been instructed by the great Kukulcan to investigate all things and conditions at Mictolan before I ventured anything. I had been charged to make sure all of Kukulcan's ancient laws and orders had been fulfilled, because, I added, unless the people of Mictolan were living and worshipping in accordance with Kukulcan's wishes, their deliverance would not be possible. At these words I saw the old villain wince. Well he knew that he, at least, had not followed the laws of the ancient Mayas; that he had perverted the religion; had usurped the powers of the king, and had been a law unto himself. And when, ignoring his suggestion that I should conduct my observations in his company, I declared my intention of making my investigations in my own way, I saw by his expression and his blazing eyes that he was prepared to stop at nothing to prevent me from learning the truth. But he did not press the matter further. Then I had a shot at him myself. I desired, I said, to meet the King of Mictolan, and I pretended to be vastly insulted at the monarch's failure to visit me.

The old fellow was frightened, I could see. But he quickly recovered himself. The king, he declared, had died two years previously, and as the people had not been able to agree upon his successor, they had appointed him, Kinchi Haman, to act as regent.

I pretended to accept this explanation, but he was ill at ease, and presently, pleading religious duties, he withdrew—much to my delight.

HARDLY had he left when Aczopil arrived with Itza. She seemed even more beautiful than before and rushed to my arms with a happy cry. Holding her close, I received the Prince's salutations, told him I wished him to dismiss the present retinue of the palace and provide persons of his own selection, and then, feeling perfect confidence in him, I told him of my suspicions of the priest. I was not sorry I confided in him. He was as frank with me as I had been with him. He had no doubt that Kinchi Haman was my enemy, though he declared that the priest would not dare to do anything to arouse the enmity or the wrath of the son of Kukulcan (for of course the prince believed me such) but, he added, it might be different with Kinchi Haman's attitude towards him and his friends. However, he had no fear of the priest. The royalist party was very strong and powerful. With me as his friend, he feared nothing, and he doubted if the old rascal would dare defy me or show his enmity towards the prince, as long as I favored and honored him. He also confirmed all my suspicions regarding Kinchi Haman. The priest had run things to suit himself. He had practised human sacrifices upon the temple altars, he had oppressed the people; he had declared himself supreme, and he had become overbearingly cruel, vindictive and ruthless. And as he talked and acquainted me with the conditions and affairs, I learned of the terrible fate to which Kinchi Haman had doomed my beloved Itza. She had spoken of being betrothed to Kinich Ahau, of being pledged to wed him on the moon of the Tonalmatl, but what this meant had not occurred to me. Obsessed with my love for her, and with so much else to occupy my mind, I had failed to realize what it meant. But now, as Aczopil referred to it, I wondered that I could have been so dull. Kinich Ahau was the Sun God. Itza was a Virgin of the Sun, and she had been selected to wed the god in symbolic form by being cast alive into the yawning black depths of the sacred well!

Cold shivers ran down my spine at the mere thought of that possibility and I fervently thanked God that I had come to Mictolan in time to save her. She had spoken of it calmly, quite as a matter of course. But, I realized later that this was only natural. To her and her fellow maidens it would have been an honor. By thus dying in the sacred well they would—they believed—become the mates of the Sun God; they would dwell forever in paradise; it was a martyrdom they sought with religious fervor.

But Itza was very human, very feminine. Once her love had been aroused, her religious fanaticism dwindled, and she was as anxious to live and become my bride as she had been anxious before to meet death, to become the bride of Kinich Ahau. I drew her closer to me as I thought of those other maidens who were doomed to be cast into that hideous well. I determined that they should not be killed. Even though the Sacrifice of the Virgins was a sacred universal custom of the Mayan religion, it should not occur while I was in Mictolan. No, not even if I were forced to hurl the priest into the depths myself to prevent it. But the day of sacrifice was distant. Only on the moon of the cycle of Tonalmatl were the virgins wed to Kinich Ahau, and that was still several months ahead. Much might happen before then, and telling the prince I wished to see the city, I asked him to accompany me, and with Itza clinging to my hand we left the palace.

That day was a day of the most amazing discoveries, of incredible surprises beyond my wildest dreams. I was quite prepared to find that these Mayas had advanced far beyond the civilization at the time of the conquest, and the fact that they had discovered the arch, that they had developed many of their arts to such a high degree, confirmed this. But I had never imagined for a single moment that they had advanced to such astounding heights in some directions, nor that it was possible for a race to acquire a knowledge of certain forces beyond that of any other race, and yet remain so primitive, so archaic in other directions. That, to me at the time was—and for that matter is even now—the most incredible, the most astonishing feature of the place. Here was a race, or rather a community, still in many respects no nearer the highest civilization than their ancestors centuries before had been—a people without even the knowledge of the wheel, a race ignorant of steel, a community cut off from the entire world, following an immeasurably ancient religion, yet controlling forces of which we, the most highly advanced of known races, knew nothing. And yet in a way, it might have been expected. I knew that the ancient Mayas had, ages before the dawn of the Christian era, developed the most perfect numerical system in the world; that they had invented a calendar more accurate than anything up to the time of the revised Gregorian calendar; that they had an intimate knowledge of astronomy; that their glyphed or written language was without a parallel in the world, and yet they had never learned how to make an arch.

These were facts known to every student of American archeology and were inexplicable puzzles, mysteries as great as how the Mayas produced their wonderful sculptured monuments, how they worked the hardest of precious stones, how they accomplished many remarkable feats. But here, in Mictolan, their strange paradoxical development had gone beyond all bounds of imagination. They still used their ancient—their immeasurably ancient—system of mathematics, the vigesimal system; they still used the equally ancient calendrical system of the Tonalmatl or religious calendar, the Calendar-Round the Initial Series dates, the Long Count and the Cycles by which any date could be established within a period of five million years, and they still used the glyph writing. Had they possessed wheels, had they discovered the use of iron or steel, had they even acquired a knowledge of machinery, of chemistry, of electricity, I might not have been so greatly astonished. But they had none of these, and yet they possessed an intimate knowledge of matters undreamed of, unsuspected by any other race on earth, of matters that seemed downright uncanny, supernatural and utterly beyond belief.

CHAPTER X

The Gods Who Carved the Stones

I HAD already noticed the gigantic size of vegetable products, and I had assumed that their size was partly, if not wholly, due to the fact that there was no darkness in the valley. In this surmise I found I was correct, but the light itself, which was the basic source of this light that so puzzled me, was most astounding. In fact, its source was also the source of everything amazing that I observed. It was radium, or at least some intensely radio-active material, which apparently existed in vast quantities in a certain section of the valley. How the people had learned to make use of this marvelous force of nature of which we know so little, I cannot say; but as will be seen, certain things that I discovered led me to believe that it had been used, for certain purposes, from the most ancient times by the Mayas—and possibly by other prehistoric Amer-

ican races. This was my first epochal discovery, and it explained many hitherto inexplicable matters. We had passed through the city and had wandered across the fields beyond, when, in gazing across the valley to the east, I noticed a barren, desolate area. Calling the prince's attention to it, I asked about it. To my astonishment he replied that it was "the sacred place of the gods who cut the stones." I felt I was on the verge of a most interesting and epochal discovery, so I started towards the spot despite the protests of Azcopil, who seemed to have a superstitious terror of the place. Itza, too, held back, evidently in fear, but neither could give a lucid or intelligent reason for his dread. The gods, or spirits (the two are synonymous in the Zutugil), were powerful, they brought illness and death upon all who invaded their domain, and though they were those "who carved the stones" they must be paid for their work by lives and, added the prince, for many Katuns the people had not employed them to cut the stones as the toll of lives was too great, but had used painted stones instead. Indeed, he declared, at one time in the distant past, so many lives had been taken by those "who carved the stones" that the city had been nearly depopulated. At that time, he said, the people did not know why they sickened and died, but a wise priest, one Tutul Hunac, had made a great sacrifice to the god Hunabku, who had revealed the cause of the deaths to the priest. Here was a mystery. I had noticed that there were many monuments and buildings covered with painted or frescoed designs, that all the sculptures appeared very ancient, and I had wondered about it. Now Azcopil was telling me a strange, involved story—a myth or legend or allegory—to account for it. More intent than ever on learning what it all meant, who or what were the "gods who carved the stones," I laughed at his fears, reminded him that I, the son of Kukulcan, was more powerful than his evil gods, and bidding him remain behind with Itza, for I had no mind to expose her to any dangers either real or imaginary, I hurried towards the dismal looking spot.

I had never seen anything just like it. It seemed to be an expanse of black, clay-like material, the decomposed débris that had fallen from a vein in the hillside above it and, all about it, were immense blocks and columns of squared stone. Examining these, I discovered that the surfaces of some were covered with a peculiar gum-like material laid on in complicated patterns. One of these rested at the very edge of the black deposit, and as I stooped over it, I uttered an involuntary exclamation of amazement.

Wherever it had touched the blackish material, the surface of the stone had been deeply cut or eaten away, leaving the portions covered with the gummy coating in high relief! Sudden realization flashed upon me. The "gods who carved the stone!" The forbidding black clay! The stuff itself was the prince's "gods!" It possessed some power, some quality to eat into the solid rock as acid eats into steel. The whole mystery of how the Mayas accomplished their marvelous sculptures was solved! The stone monuments, the façades of their buildings, had not been carved by hand. They had been etched, etched on a gigantic scale by means of this strange, black mineral substance. What was it? What terrible corrosive power did it possess? I shuddered and shrank back. A substance that could eat into the hard rock was to be given a wide berth. No wonder the prince had feared the place. Then I remembered his story, the toll of lives exacted by the "gods who carved the rock." It was clear enough now.

All who had come into contact with the terrible substance had been destroyed. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, must have been employed in hauling the countless masses of stones to the spot, in painting the lacquered designs upon their surfaces, in placing the stones in the corrosive clay, in withdrawing the stones after they had been etched, in handling and cleaning them. And all of these men who had touched the incredibly powerful material, had succumbed to its effects.

I shuddered as I thought of what agonies they must have suffered, of how their flesh and bones must have been eaten away as if by fire. Perhaps even the emanations of the material were deadly, and I hurriedly retreated at the thought. Azcopil had said that in the past the valley had been almost depopulated by the "gods who carved the stones." As I recalled his words, I remembered the prophecy as related by old Katchilkan —"The people shall wither and die. Those who carved the stones and placed the images shall vanish." Here was the explanation, the solution of the mystery of the disappearance of the Mayas! They had been destroyed, wiped out by the very means they had employed to produce their greatest monuments! I felt sure of it, convinced of it. If the horrible stuff existed here, if the people had used it for etching the stones, it must have existed elsewhere, must have been used in other places. That no one had hitherto discovered it, meant nothing. Perhaps, during the centuries, it had disintegrated, disappeared. Perhaps it still existed in some remote, hidden localities. But that it had been the prime factor in the destruction of the civilization, I felt assured.

Here in Mictolan the segregated survivors of the people had come close to utter annihilation by it. They had only escaped extermination by the wise old priest, Tutul Hunac, who put an end to etching the stones. No doubt, elsewhere, the people had gone blindly on, believing superstitiously that the gods demanded human lives in return for carving the stones, until the race had been decimated, reduced to a handful of survivors. But what could the material be? What mineral could possess such powers? A wild idea occurred to me. Was it, could it contain radium? Was the black mineral exuding from the mountain side pitchblende? It had

I stared at it fascinated and stepped closer

all the earmarks of that wonderful ore. And there was that strange fluorescent light. Had these people harnessed the mysterious powers of radium? Had they a knowledge of forces of which we had not dreamed? Was I on the verge of discoveries even more remarkable, more incredible than any I had yet made? For a space, my brain whirled, my thoughts ran wild, I gave my imagination full rein. But I was soon to learn that the actuality was far beyond my wildest dreams.

RETURNING to Itza and the prince—who were vastly relieved at seeing me alive and unharmed—I plied Azcopil with questions. But he could give me little intelligible information. The light that came at night was a gift of the gods, he declared; it had always been so; but the light from the temples, the bridge of light—only the high priest knew their secrets. And, he added, hesitantly and with furtive glances, the priest knew other secrets; he possessed powers unknown to all others.

"Aye, even power over the Monster of Sacrifices," put in Itza, in affrighted tones.

"Monster of Sacrifices?" I reiterated. "Who or what, my beloved, is this monster of whom you speak?"

"I cannot say, my lord," she replied. "Only Kinchi Haman may see the monster; for others it is death to look upon him. And each month a maiden or a youth must be sacrificed unto him."

"Hmm," I muttered, "I must look into this. There is no monster that the son of Kukulcan may not look upon." It sounded to me like the old Minotaur myth. I wondered what the old faker had up his sleeve.

"And where does this monster dwell?" I asked.

"Within the sacred innermost temple," replied Azcopil, "where no one but the priest may enter."

"The son of Kukulcan may enter all places," I declared. "I shall look upon him and shall destroy him. The law of Kukulcan forbids the sacrifice of human lives."

The faces of Itza and the prince paled. "But, my lord!" exclaimed Azcopil, "though it is a monster, yet it is a god and cannot be destroyed."

I laughed. "God or no god, yet I shall destroy it," I assured him.

For a space the prince was lost in thought. Then: "My lord," he said earnestly, "until now I have not spoken of it. But the words of my lord force me to speak. We, of the House of Nima Kiche, in the long ago, had given unto us a prophecy. From the lips of my father, Tutil Nima, I heard it, even as he heard it from the lips of his father, Xima Tutil, and as each eldest son has heard it from his father since the days when it was given unto our house.

"To none should this prophecy be revealed until the house of Nima Kiche no longer ruled, and unto Mictolan came one who would again raise our house to power. He, so goes the prophecy, should be a stranger and should cast down our enemies, and he should mate with a maiden of the Itzaes, and should destroy the Monster of the Sacrifices. So, my lord, when I looked upon my lord as he passed with the maiden Itza by his side, I knew that the stranger of the prophecy had come, and now that my lord says he will destroy the Monster of the Sacrifices, I know that the hour has come to reveal the prophecy of the house of Nima Kiche. Blame me not, my lord, for the words of the prophecy. They are not mine, but have come down through many Baktuns, aye even from the days of Tohil the Rumbler. It is even more ancient than the Book of Kukulcan, and, in this prophecy, it is foretold that the land of the Kitche Maya should be overrun by strangers of white skins and bearded faces, and that the people of the Kingdom of Zibalba should be destroyed and scattered, and that new gods should be set up and only in the City of Mictolan should the house of Nima Kiche survive. And Kukulcan should never come unto his people, but that the bearer of his token should be a stranger and a mortal, and one who possessed the power of the stranger's gods. And that the people of Mictolan should forever remain within the city and that there should be war and battle and the stranger's gods should prevail and the priests of the cult of the black Enchuah should be cast down, and that the bearer of the token should wed with a maid of the House of Itza and should depart from Mictolan and the House of Nima Kiche should again rule in the land. And as much of the prophecy has come to pass, my lord, I know that it is true, and that all shall be fulfilled, even as it is foretold."

Itza had listened, wide-eyed, with bated breath, to the words of the prince. And now, as he ended, she threw herself into my arms. "Oh, my lord, my loved one!" she cried. "Is it true? Is my lord then a mortal like myself? Then, my lord, I may wed with thee without fear, and great, indeed, will be my happiness!"

I nodded confirmation as I held her close. "Even as the prophecy says, it is so," I assured her. Turning to the prince, I said: "Then, from the first you, my brother, have known I was no son of Kukulcan? Think you, Kinchi Haman knows of this prophecy?"

Azcopil looked troubled. "Who can say?" he replied at length. "He has great wisdom and knows many things. It is said that he puts on the cloak of darkness, and unseen by men wanders about, listening to all. But what matters it, my lord. The prophecy says he will be overthrown; that you shall triumph, and as it is foretold so must it come to pass."

His faith in the prophecy was sublime, but I could not blame him for placing absolute confidence in it. Had I not seen the prophecy of Kukulcan fulfilled to the letter? Had not this new prophecy thus far been borne out? I am not superstitious, I have no belief in prophecies or in the occult, and yet—well, I could not deny the truth of what I had actually seen and experienced, and I confess I was beginning to believe that the old Mayas possessed some power of divining the future of which we know nothing. Still I was not yet enough of a fatalist, nor sufficiently convinced of the truth of the prophecy, to trust entirely to it. But there was no use in worrying over what might or might not happen. The revelations of the prince had cleared the air. No longer need I attempt to pose as a divinity with him. No longer did Itza look upon me as a superior being. And as the prince assured me that the greater portion of the inhabitants were loyal to his house, and secretly hated Kinchi Haman, I felt that, no matter what difficulties might arise, I could count upon having a majority on my side.

HAD I followed out my own wishes, I would have left Mictolan and its people to solve their problems as best they might and have taken the first opportunity to clear out with Itza. But I realized that such a course was impossible. Even alone, there was not one chance in thousands that I could ever reach civilization. The mere thought of the horrors, the dangers I would have to face, appalled me, and to expose the girl whom I loved more than my life, to almost certain death, and to the most terrible hardships and sufferings, anyway, was not to be thought of for a moment. Far better to remain forever in the valley, to live with Itza forever, cut off from civilization and my fellows, than to attempt flight. And, I felt, life in Mictolan, with Itza as my wife, and with the hideous old priest gone and Azcopil reigning as king, would be as pleasant and enjoyable an existence as any mortal man had a right to expect. I even began to have dreams of my future there, of the

things I might accomplish, of the modernities I might establish, of the busy interesting life I would lead teaching the Mictolans, helping them onwards, watching the development of their civilization, while I taught them about machinery, about electricity, about innumerable matters of which they knew nothing. Meanwhile, we had circled the valley and had come to the avenue leading from the city to the tunnel through which I had entered the valley. Filled with the most intense curiosity to see that marvelous bridge of light once more, I expressed my wishes to my companions.

But at Itza's words I halted, astounded, incredulous. There was no bridge of light, she declared. It had ceased as soon as I had reached the valley. It had existed only to afford me passage!

It seemed incredible. How and by whom had it been created? How and by whom could it have been destroyed? I could not believe her. I felt sure the thing was a natural, a mysterious, an inexplicable phenomenon, and that she was merely repeating some ancient myth or prophecy. Determined to learn the truth, to discover the source, the cause of the luminous bridge, I hurried towards the opening in the mountain side. The way was still illuminated by the soft glow, and having discovered the bed of radioactive clay, as I believed it to be, I assumed the light came from some similar material in the rock. My examination of the walls confirmed this. Minute particles of black were visible in the reddish rock, and I noticed that where these were most numerous, the tunnel was most brightly illuminated.

But when at last we came to the vast chasm, I stopped in utter amazement. It yawned before us, terrific, black, bottomless, with no sign of the gleaming, multicolored beam of effulgence spanning its depths like a bridge built of a rainbow. But my amazement, my wonder, was forgotten in my realization of what it meant. All retreat from the valley was cut off! No matter what happened, I was doomed to remain forever in Mictolan. I had no doubt that Kinchi Haman was responsible. Somehow, by some unknown, some almost magic power, he could control the bridge of light. He suspected me. He had no desire that I should escape, until such time as he saw fit to lead his people from the valley. And I was convinced that he would never do that, that he had no faith in the prophecy and that he knew far more of the outside world than I suspected or that anyone dreamed of.

To be sure, he had been as terrified of my pistol as any of his people, and I felt sure he was wholly unfamiliar with firearms; but that did not prove that he had not, by some means, learned that the white men had overrun the land, that it would be impossible for his people ever to regain their country and to restore the old order of things as provided in the Book of Kukulcan, and that, knowing this, he intended to keep me a prisoner and, by cutting off all possible means of escape, to put an effectual stop to his people attempting to leave the valley. Intuitively I had been suspicious of him from the very first, intuitively I had felt that he did not believe me other than a mortal, a stranger; but even my intuition fell far short of the truth.

I reflected, however, that both Itza and the prince had known beforehand that the bridge of light was no longer there. So perhaps, after all, the priest—if indeed he were responsible for its disappearance—had had no ulterior motive for removing it. I questioned them both, but the only reply I got was that it was tradition, common knowledge, that with the coming of the long-expected messenger, the bridge would vanish.

"But then," I asked, "how will the people of Mictolan go forth when the time shall come, as foretold in the prophecy?"

Azcopil's eyes opened wide in astonishment. "Does not my lord know?" he exclaimed. "Does not the Book of Kukulcan tell that the people shall go forth by another road? Does it not show the symbol by which they shall know that way? Always, from my father and from the priests, have I heard that the Book of Kukulcan holds the secret of the other road."

"I know nothing of that," I assured him, as I drew the copy of the codex from my pocket. "I see nothing of that other road. Look, you, Azcopil. Do *you* see the symbol that you speak of?"

The prince examined the codex intently, and Itza, as interested as either of us, studied it, also.

"I see it! It is here!" she cried suddenly, excitedly. "See, my lord, it is here—the symbol of Kukulcan together with a foot and the reed of promise."

"Aye, thou art right, little sister!" exclaimed the prince. "But," with a note of disappointment in his voice, "a portion of the book is missing. It says not which way one turns to find that symbol. Whether to the north, the east, the west, or the south. But that matters not, my lord will go with me to the sorcerer, Nohul Voh, and by his powers he shall show the way."

Itza drew back. "Oh, I like not Nohul Voh!" she cried. "He is most wicked and works spells and does strange things. It is said—" her voice fell to a whisper, "that he takes the form of a great bat. I fear him, my lord."

I laughed. "Fear not, dearly beloved," I reassured her. "Your Nohul Voh will not harm the betrothed of the son of Kukulcan, and to him as to all the others, I am that."

Azcopil smiled. "And he is a true follower of the house of my fathers," he declared. "His hatred of Kinchi Haman is great, indeed, and often have I gone to him for advice, though never will he show me his smoke of magic. But he told me of your coming, my lord; yes, told me days ahead, though I spoke not of it to anyone."

"What?" I cried. "You mean he knew of my coming? Come, then, O, prince, I would see this sorcerer. But call me not 'Lord,' Azcopil; nor thee, my Itza."

The prince grinned and Itza flushed and smiled. "Does my brother know that he has another name among my people?" he asked. "Everywhere they speak of you as Itzimin Chac (thunder and lightning). Would it please my brother if I called him Itzimin?"

"It will serve well," I told him.

"And most fitting," smiled Itza, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes as she glanced up at me. "For is not Itzimin Chac the master of the sky, Itza? And art thou not to me both lover and master?"

"Aye, a terrible master!" I laughed. "Fear you not my black anger and my roaring?"

"No more than the sky fears the thunder," she cried gaily. "Does not the sky always triumph and rule the thunder in the end?"

"As you, little tease, shall ever rule me," I declared.

The prince grinned. "That, Itzimin, is the most certain of all things," he said. "Was there ever a man who could really rule a woman?"

"That," I replied with a chuckle, "is a question you might better ask your Nohul Voh."

CHAPTER XI

The Sorcerer

THE home of Nohul Voh was on the outskirts of the city, a strange cylindrical structure of massive stones, topping a low mound in the center of a field, in which were growing gigantic weeds, herbs and strange flowers. No door, no window showed in the walls, but at several points narrow, vertical slits pierced

I recognized the picture instantly—it was the valley beyond the Cave of the Bats!

the masonry. As we approached, Azcopil nudged me. "It is a favorable time," he announced in a low voice. "See, the Nohul Voh is in his field gathering his magic herbs. I feared we might find him busy with the spirits or the stars."

Moving slowly about, and almost completely hidden by the huge plants, was a stooping figure. He was draped in a robe of black, ornamented with weird symbols and figures of many colors; long, tangled, white hair fell like a heavy mantle about his shoulders and his face, and as his back was towards us, his features were completely hidden. Without speaking, noiselessly, we approached him. And so wholly unexpected was it, that I actually jumped when he spoke. "Welcome, bearer of the Book of Kukulcan!" he rumbled in a deep voice that seemed scarcely human, and without turning or glancing up. "And welcome, Prince, and thee, Itza, maid of Kinich Ahau. I have been awaiting you, aye, since first you set out this morning and, passing by the Place Where the Gods Carve the Stones, you stepped aside and saw; since the moment when you, Prince of the House of Nima Kiche, related the prophecy of your father's fathers; since you entered to where the Bridge of Light is no more and, when finding not the place of the road of the children of Mictolan upon the Book of Kukulcan, you sought to learn the secret from Nohul Voh."

I could scarcely believe my ears, could scarcely credit my senses. How in the name of all things did the old sorcerer know our every movement, even our words, our thoughts? Did he possess some weird, uncanny power?

I felt Itza shudder as she snuggled close to me, and I confess I had a most peculiar chilly feeling myself, for it was downright uncanny. Presently the sorcerer straightened up, turned, and approached us. I had expected to see a seamed, wrinkled, toothless, ancient man. His snow-white hair spoke of great age, and Azcopil had told me that Nohul Voh had been an old sorcerer in the days of his father's father's father. But the face he turned towards me was that of a youth, clear, smooth-skinned, bright-eyed, and with features as untouched by age as those of the prince beside me. Yet there was something about his face, something in the eyes, that spoke of great wisdom and of a knowledge beyond that of other men. And as he gazed steadfastly at me, I felt that he was looking into my inmost soul, was reading my most secret thoughts.

"My lord has come to Nohul Voh to learn of the road of the symbols," he said in his strangely deep voice. "He has come with the last of the House of Nima Kiche and with the maiden he desires to wed. It is well. The Kinchi Haman plans and plots, but he can learn nothing of the book of the future from Nohul Voh. Yet unto you, Itzimin Chac, will I reveal much. Come, my lord."

Turning, he led the way through the giant weeds to the base of the mound, where, opening a massive wooden door, he stood aside, signalled for us to enter, and closed and fastened the portal behind us. For a few steps he led the way through a narrow dark passage. Then, without warning, a soft clear light burst upon us and I stared about in amazement. Had I been suddenly transported to the laboratory of an alchemist, I could not have been more surprised. We were in a large room, and everywhere the walls were hung with mystical figures on sheets of vellum, with bundles of dried plants and herbs, with the skulls of men and beasts, stuffed birds and quadrupeds, packages and bundles, and innumerable odd-shaped vessels and strange utensils.

Hanging near the ceiling in the center of the room was a sphere that glowed like a miniature moon and illuminated the entire chamber. Below this was a table of stone covered with sheets of papyrus bearing innumerable diagrams, symbols, and written Mayan characters, together with metal instruments and an abacus-like affair. At one side a pottery vessel, most marvelously like a retort, simmered over a charcoal brazier. Opposite this was a pillar of carved stone, perhaps three feet in height by four feet in diameter, and with upright rods of metal about its circumference. Above this, suspended in mid-air, without visible support, was a ball of polished green stone which rotated slowly upon its axis and swung in a circle above the top of the column, now and then touching one of the upright rods and emitting a low musical sound. I stared at it fascinated and stepped closer. What held it there? What unknown unseen power kept it ceaselessly rotating, following an orbit? Then I saw that the surface of the polished top of the column was covered with incised lines and glyphs and that, at the base of each upright rod, was an astronomical symbol. But before I could make head or tail of the remarkable device, before I could frame a question, the sorcerer spoke.

"My lord doubts the powers of Nohul Voh," he said. "He thinks the future may not be read even though the past may be known. He says in his heart there is no magic, nothing that cannot be explained, nothing that is not a law of the gods. My lord, Itzimin Chac, is right. There is no magic, nothing that is not according to the laws of the gods. But there is wisdom, there is knowledge that some possess, of which others know nothing. My lord has the knowledge of making the thunder and the lightning serve him, but of that knowledge even I, Nohul Voh, know nothing. But I, Nohul Voh, have knowledge of how to make forces serve me, of which my lord knows nothing. My lord knows not how

the fall of stone moves about, he cannot read the meanings of its motion. But to me it is clear, as clear as the future and the past, that I read in the smoke that the Prince Azcopil calls magic.

To no living man or woman will Nohul Voh reveal the future, for to know the future is to know unhappiness and fear. But to my lord who bears the Book of Kukulcan will I reveal some things that he desires to know. But only to my lord alone. Remain with the maiden here, O Prince, while Itzimin Chac learns what he desires."

HE was standing close beside me as he spoke, he was in full view. Then, before my amazed, incredulous eyes, he rose slowly in the air and, like a wisp of cloud, drifted across the room. Itza shrieked, the prince shrank back, and I stared, wide-eyed, gaping at the miracle. And as he floated towards the wall his lips moved and again he spoke. "Have no fear, Itza, beloved of Itzimin Chac," he said. "No harm will befall."

The next instant he had reached the wall. A massive stone swung noiselessly aside, revealing a secret opening, and Nohul Voh beckoned me to follow him.

In a daze, bereft of all senses save utter amazement, I sprang through the opening and found myself in a second, smaller room illuminated by means of the same mysterious light. The sorcerer was once more standing, a smile upon his lips, and, bidding me be seated upon a massive stone chair, he stepped towards a magnificent ceremonial incense-burner of immense size.

"First, my lord, you must have faith," he announced, his eyes fixed upon mine. "In your heart I read that you doubt, so I must convince you, even against your own will. For many days I have watched you, my lord, as you came onwards towards Mictolan. I have seen you conversing with the priest, Katchilcan, I have seen you in the ancient temple bound by the savages, I have seen you surrounded by the raging waters in the Valley of Death and passing with the chief through the Tunnel of the Serpents; I have seen you cross the Pit of the Alligators, have seen you destroy the fiend Neztpehua and cross the eight deserts. I have watched you in the realm of hot ashes and the blazing mountains, as you led the demon Ixputeque to its death, and I have seen you in the Cave of Bats, lost and wandering in the darkness, until you came unto the Bridge of Light and the maiden Itza and found your fate."

I was thunderstruck. I felt as though I were speaking my own thoughts aloud. Had he read my thoughts? Had he by some form of hypnosis been able to revisualize, step by step, all the scenes and incidents I had been through? I did not know. But I was positive that I was not consciously hypnotized. My mind was functioning clearly, I was reasoning, I was even planning some means, some question that would be a test; something, some secret known only to myself.

He had said he had seen me talking with Katchilcan. How much did he know of what had gone before? Could he tell me where I had found the codex that had led to all my astounding discoveries and adventures?

"It is all as you say," I assured him. "But tell me, Nohul Voh, whence came I to the village of Katchilcan?"

He shook his head. "To all things there is a limit," he said. "Does the loftiest mountain reach to the moon? Does the vulture perch upon the stars? Does the maize plant grow to height of the mountain? Does man live forever? No, my lord, even knowledge has its end fixed by the gods. Whence you came to the village of the priest I know not. Neither do I know when nor how you came by the Book of Kukulcan. But that you came by it honestly I know, for otherwise your way would not have been made easy, as was foretold in the prophecy. Is my lord ready to believe what I may show him?"

I was even more amazed at his words than if he had told me of my every movement and action since I entered Salceda's shop at Vigo. For it was obvious, certain, that he did *not* read my thoughts, that I was *not* hypnotized. And I was convinced, even though my reason told me I should not be, that Nohul Voh possessed an uncanny, an almost supernatural power. If he could look into the past, might he not be able to look into the future? Was it not possible—even certain—that he had accomplished what countless men had dreamed of doing? Memories of theories of the fourth dimension, of extravagant fiction, of impossible, wholly imaginary stories raced through my brain. But none, nothing I had ever heard or read was as seemingly unreal, impossible and fictional as what was actually being demonstrated to me in this ancient city of the Mayas.

AT last I found my voice. "I am convinced, O, Nohul Voh," I declared. "Whatever you may show me, I will believe."

He smiled. "Then, behold!" he exclaimed, removing the cover from the incense burner and stepping quickly to one side. For a brief moment I saw nothing. Then a thin, luminous wisp, similar to smoke in the beam of an electric light, rose from the great earthen vessel. Slowly it spread, mushrooming out, undulating, unfolding, until it formed a great cloud completely concealing the room beyond it. I gazed at it, watched it with fascinated eyes, hardly knowing what to expect. Lighter and darker areas appeared upon the now stationary bank of vapor. Patches of brown, of green, of blue appeared and slowly, little by little, like a dissolving view, a picture developed before my eyes. I recognized the picture instantly; it was the valley beyond the Cave of the Bats! There were the towering mountains, there was the cliff with the huge stone image of Kukulcan cut deeply into its surface. I seemed to be moving towards it. The valley and the hills came nearer and nearer. A stream dashed, foaming, through the valley. Beside a shaded pool a bare ledge jutted up, and upon the surface of the water-polished rock I saw the symbol that Itza had discovered in my codex—the symbol of Kukulcan, the foot and the reed.

Now the scene was fading away. The stream broadened into a river. The mountains became lower. I seemed floating upon the tranquil river in a boat, and before me rose a mountain side, a terrible precipice. At the base the river vanished in a black, arched tunnel. It raced towards me. Suddenly the smoke screen turned inky black. Then a speck of light appeared upon it. Rapidly it increased in size. A vast expanse of sparkling blue water appeared, gleaming under a sun-bright sky. Above its farther shores rose wooded hills, purple in the distance. Close to where I seemed to float upon the surface of the lake a rocky island rose, and clearly visible upon the surface of a water-washed cliff I saw the symbol once more. Slowly the picture faded, once more the glowing vapor rolled and writhed. It thinned, broke into wisps, and, stepping forward quickly, Nohul Voh replaced the cover on the huge urn. I lay back, weak, speechless. "My lord has seen the road of the symbol."

At his words I seemed to come out of a trance. I laughed almost hysterically. "And to what purpose?" I asked almost unconsciously, for my thoughts were a confused jumble. "I have seen neither the beginning nor the end."

"The end, I cannot show," he declared, shaking his mane of white hair. "And the beginning is here in Mictolan. Across the Bridge of Light and through the Cave of the Bats."

"Then, O, Nohul Voh, I have learned nothing," I

exclaimed. "With no Bridge of Light to cross, of what value the road beyond?"

He came towards me, seated himself close to me and spoke earnestly.

"My son," he said, "perhaps Kinchi Haman knows the secret of the Bridge of Light. But it will come again as always from the beginning it has come and gone.

"When the many-colored flames rise from the temples, then, my son, you may know that the Bridge of Light spans the chasm.

"Watch for those flames, my lord, and when they rise, hurry with the maiden and cross on that bridge of light without delay. Woe to you should the flames cease when you and the maid are midway from rock to rock!"

"And cannot you, who can read the future, say whether that may or may not happen?" I demanded, a tone of sarcasm in my voice.

"It would be of no avail, rather a hindrance, could I reveal it," he replied. "If I should say unto you that death awaited you and the maiden, it would cause you pain and suffering and life would not be worth the living. Should I tell you that you would cross in safety, and you believed me, you would have no uncertainty of the future and life would lose its greatest zest. Nay, my son, of the future I will not speak. But of the past or rather of the present I would say a word. I said I knew you had come by honest means to be the holder of the Book of Kukulcan. I said I knew not whence you came. But this I know, that you are not of my race, are not the son of Kukulcan. No, start not, it matters nothing. In the prophecy it is not said that the symbol should be brought by a man of the Kitche-Maya nor of the House of Kukulcan, but by a stranger. And also I know that the people of Mictolan will not be brought forth by you, my lord. Long ago has the allotted time passed.

"There is much in the ancient prophecy that none but I, Nohul Voh, can read.

"Nay, even Kinchi Haman knows it not, for while much of the Book of Kukulcan is written in the Itzae symbols, yet much was written for secrecy in the symbols of Ziyan Caan, known only to the House of Cocome Voh, of which I, Nohul Voh, am the last.

"And in that secret writing it is foretold, that if the messenger comes not with the symbol by the end of the thirteenth Katun, the power of the Kiche Maya will be forever at an end."

I gasped. The thirteenth Katun! I had made a rapid mental calculation as he spoke. That was somewhere about the twelfth century A. D. I had come a mere matter of some eight centuries too late!

But Nohul Voh was again speaking. "But even though the Kinchi Haman knows not this," he was saying, "he knows that the bearer of the symbol foretold in the prophecy must bear upon his breast the mark of the House of Tutul Zius, and my son bears not that mark. He dares not ask my lord, yet he but half believes, and he plots and schemes to see. And though I will reveal nothing of the future, even to you, my son, yet I am your friend and the friend of the Prince Azcopil and I would see the downfall of Kinchi Haman, and, if my lord consents, I will place upon his breast the secret mark of the Tutul Zius that is known only to those of the inner circles. And thus may the Kinchi Haman be betrayed."

I laughed. "There, O Nohul Voh, it must [illegible] written in the book of the future that I shall [illegible] mark placed upon my brea[illegible] your hand, and who can escape Fate. So be it. O Great [illegible] the [illegible]."

CHAPTER XII

At the Temple of the Plumed Serpent

WHEN I rejoined Itza and Azcopil in the outer chamber, my chest bore a beautifully tattooed clan-mark of the Tutul Zius, and I felt as if a live scorpion was under my shirt. Nohul Voh had cautioned me not to mention the matter even to the prince or to Itza, nor to permit anyone to see the recently tattooed design for the present. In a week's time, aided by an ungent he had given me, he assured me that no one, not even Kinchi Haman, would guess I had not borne the symbol for years, and then, he added, the more who saw it the better.

Itza, poor girl, had been greatly worried at my absence, and as I entered the room she uttered a glad cry and rushed into my arms. She was very nervous, for she had the superstitious fears of her race for all things savoring of the unknown and for more than two hours she had been regaled by Azcopil's highly-colored tales of the weird doings of the sorcerer.

The prince, however, did not appear to have worried over my prolonged session with Nohul Voh. "Truly," he exclaimed with a laugh, "Nohul Voh has had time to show you the past and future from the beginning of time until the end of all things. Twenty times and more has the green ball moved about its circuit."

I stepped closer to the sphere, still swinging slowly around the circumference of the column top, and whirling around and around as it did so. I examined it from every angle, but could see no support, nothing that held it suspended, no connection with any other object. It seemed actually to float in air.

"My lord Itzimin wonders at the ball of time," rumbled Nohul Voh, who was watching me. "Fear not to touch it, if you so desire, my lord."

I did desire, and taking him at his word, I cautiously extended my hand and touched the gleaming green sphere. I had expected that my touch would stop it or at least disturb its motion. Judge of my utter amazement when it swung by my hand without veering a fraction of an inch from its circuit! With all my strength I pushed against it; but I might as well have pushed against one of the massive stones in the wall of the room! It was as immovable, as firmly fixed as though it were held by steel rods!

Nohul Voh chuckled. Azcopil gaped. Itza stared, half-frightened, at the seeming magic. I could scarcely credit my senses. It seemed impossible, absolutely contrary to all rules and laws of physics. All that had gone before—the vision of the smoke, Nohul Voh's description of my journey—were nothing in comparison with this phenomenon. I had already decided in my own mind that the smoke-cloud, the vision, were all delusions, some form of hypnosis. But there was nothing visionary, nothing of hypnotism about this floating, silently rotating sphere of green, that could not be moved, could not be diverted from its course.

The sorcerer seemed to read my thoughts. "Yet it is but the law of the gods," he declared. "Do not the stars float in the sky? Do not the sun and the moon move across the heavens? And can they be stopped, can they be moved? And the law of the gods that keeps the sun, the moon, the stars in their places keeps also the ball of green in its place. My lord Itzimin has great [illegible] of matters of which I know nothing. I, Nohul Voh, [illegible] knowledge of matters of which my [illegible] shall impart to the [illegible] that which it is desirable to know. Come [illegible] we will [illegible] desire, Itzimin Caan, and we [illegible] Nohul Voh [illegible] teach me [illegible] written in the Book of Destiny. May

happiness be yours, my lord, and yours my daughter, and yours, O, Prince."

As he spoke, the door swung open, and bidding Nohul Voh farewell, we stepped from the strange, mysterious chamber into the brilliant sunshine.

Clear against the deep blue sky the temple rose in a silhouette of silvery white, and half-expectantly, I glanced at its summit. There was no sign of the lambent, multicolored flames. The Bridge of Light was still cut off. Kinchi Haman awaited me in my palace. He frowned at sight of Azcopil, he glared at Itza, but he spoke quietly, courteously. The people, he said, awaited the son of Kukulcan within the temple. The gods awaited him to lead the people of Mictolan in worship. It was time that I did so. Would I come with him and conduct the ceremony of the setting sun?

My heart sank. The wily old rascal had me in a trap. As the semi-divine bearer of the symbol, as the descendant of the Plumed Serpent, I was the supreme head of the cult of Kukulcan. As a priest of his temple, I ranked higher than all others. But I had not the remotest idea of the ceremonies, the worship of the cult. That it called for elaborate rituals, for offerings, for prayers and chants in the secret sacred language of the cult, that it entailed self-sacrifices of the priest's blood, I knew. But how, at what points in the ceremony? If I attempted it, my every move, my every word would betray me, and the old priest would know I was an impostor. If I refused, both he and the people would know something was amiss.

ALL these thoughts and misgivings flashed through my mind in an instant. Then an inspiration came to me. I would bluff the old rascal, would catch him in his own trap. He wished to force me to betray myself by taking part in a ceremony of which I was ignorant. I would compel *him* to betray *himself;* would make him the laughing stock of his people.

I nodded assent. "It is indeed time, O, Kinchi Haman, priest of Kinich Ahau," I said solemnly. "I would give thanks to the gods for their favors, and to my father Kukulcan. Knowest thou the ritual beloved of the mighty serpent?"

An evil grin made his skeleton jaws more hideous still. "I, high priest of Mictolan, know all the ceremonies," he declared. "Am I not the Kinchi Haman, priest of the Supreme God?"

I shook my head dubiously and looked very serious. "Of Kinich Ahau, Lord of the Sun, yes," I declared judicially. "But perchance, in the many Katuns that have passed since my father walked with the Kiche Maya, much has been forgotten. Does not the prophecy say that the old gods shall be forgotten? That the religion shall be perverted? Even you—" I turned suddenly, and pointing my finger at him thundered the words—"even you have caused human sacrifices to be made in the temples of the Plumed Serpent! And thy face, O, priest, is that of Uayayab—he by whom the year is poisoned! Already the all-powerful Hunabku frowns upon you and upon your temples! Aye, it is high time the son of Kukulcan came forth to thy temples to redeem the people of Mictolan! And thou, O Kinchi Haman, thou who claimest to know all rituals, shall stand beside me before the gods and shall aid me in my ceremony and my offerings. Take heed that no false move, no wrong word, no mistake is made, or upon you will fall the vengeance of Kukulcan, as the false betrayer of his teachings!"

Terror filled the eyes of the priest as I stood over him, threatening, reviling, shaking my fist at him. He cowered back, his ghastly death's head face blanched, his teeth chattered. My random words and accusations had hit the mark somewhere. Still in doubt as to my exact status, he was filled with superstitious dread. He was not by any means certain that I did not know more of the rituals of Kukulcan than himself, and at my assured confident tones, my scathing denunciation, he had become even less certain, had begun to doubt his own knowledge, had lost all self-assurance.

In his ambition, his desire for power, his ruthless tyranny, he had usurped the powers of the priesthood of other cults than his own. He had installed himself as high-priest of all the Mayan gods, though he well knew, as I and all others familiar with Mayan mythology knew, the priests of the Plumed Serpent cult were apart from all others, a distinct order possessing secret rituals known only to themselves and amenable only to the supreme priest of their own order. He had been able to hoodwink the people, to pretend that, by favor of the gods, he had been appointed supreme head of the religion. But, so he thought, he had not fooled me. At my words, his crafty, ever-suspicious mind, had jumped to the conclusion that I knew secrets of the ceremony of Kukulcan of which he was in ignorance, and he was shaking with deadly fear that he had gotten himself into a tangle from which he would be most fortunate if he could escape. He glanced furtively about, he babbled that he must attend his own temple and conduct its ceremonies. But I shook my head and refused to listen.

"Come, time passes," I commanded him. "Today Kinich Ahau must be satisfied with the offices of the little priests. Kukulcan demands your presence. Lead the way, O, Kinchi Haman."

There was nothing he could do but obey. Still shaking and terrified, he led the way to the waiting litters and, surrounded by the plumed guards and richly-clad nobles, we were carried to the great temple of the Plumed Serpent. Everywhere, filling the great plaza, covering the flat house-tops, crowding the streets, were the people, awaiting me, eager to witness the ceremony of the setting sun conducted by the Son of Kukulcan before the altar of his father. Up the broad stone stairs of the great pyramidal *Kus* we ascended. Thrice the terrace at its summit we passed, and then, descending from our litters, I followed Kinchi Haman into the narrow, tapering doorway of the temple proper. My every sense was on the alert, my nerves keyed up. I was rapidly approaching a climax that would end either in my death or by raising me to supreme power, and it behooved me to take advantage of every opportunity.

I noted every detail of my surroundings, took in everything. And despite the danger I was in, despite the strain I was under and the dangerous part I was to play, I found my scientific interest in my surroundings rapidly overriding all other considerations. Scores, hundreds of times I had delved and wandered among the ruins of ancient Mayan temples. The form, the entrance, the narrow yard-wide passageway, the sculptures upon the stones, the frescoes on the walls, the strangely stepped-in ceiling, all were familiar. But never before had an archeologist seen the interior of a Mayan temple as it was when in daily use. No other scientist had ever seen one of the temples when it was occupied, when it contained the fittings, the furnishings, the objects devoted to the worship of the almost unknown Mayan gods. And so little was known of the people and their religion, that no one—not even Joyce or Morley, Saville or even Cervantes, had ever been able to imagine or revisualize these things. Yet here was I, following the high priest through the labyrinth of narrow corridors within a temple filled with objects such as no museum in the world possessed. Wonderful tapestries and textiles, and marvelous hangings covered with magnificent feather pictures covered the walls. In tiny niches, images of gods, of divinities, of sacred birds and beasts of

solid gold, of jade, of lapis, of crystal and of amethyst were placed.

A strange, soft, bluish light, like that of moonbeams, filled the windowless corridors. Upon the stone floors were carpets of woven matting, and sweet smelling, aromatic incense floated from mosaic-covered burners placed here and there. Everywhere the sacred red, white and green of Kukulcan was used to the exclusion of all other colors; everywhere the Plumed Serpent in all his manifold forms was prominent in the pictures and decorative motifs, and in one brightly illuminated room were arranged hundreds, thousands of stuffed or mummified Quetzal trogans, the sacred birds in whose form Kukulcan or Quetzalcoatl was first supposed to have appeared. Presently we entered a long, high, narrow chamber, and I glanced quickly about. Kinchi Haman was already donning ceremonial robes. Everywhere were carved stone chests and wooden cases filled with priceless ornaments, magnificent robes, feather crowns, ceremonial objects. Which were the ones I should use? To hesitate was to be lost. The gleaming eyes of the priest were watching my every move. I must act quickly, surely, must betray no hesitation.

Across my mind flashed the memory of Professor Cervantes' most prized possession—the painted sculptured door-lintel from Chichen Itza with its figure of a high priest of Kukulcan. And, coincidently with this memory, came the mental picture of old Kanichclan, as I had seen him attired for the ceremony of the sunset. Every detail was instantaneously photographed upon my brain. I saw every ornament, every object as plainly as though it were before my eyes. I wheeled savagely on the priest. "And since when," I demanded, "has the misshapen priest of Kinich Ahau been paramount in the temple of Kukulcan? I am the master here! You are but a menial, a slave! Bring to me the robes, the crown, the sacred objects that I may attire myself for worship."

He fairly cringed. Once more I had bluffed him. With babbled excuses he scurried about, bringing me robes, sandals, crown. I studied each as he presented it, racked my memory to be sure. Twice I hurled the objects from me and berated him. One, an elaborated, magnificent feather headdress, bore blue and yellow plumes; the other, a great golden disk, bore the symbol of Itzama, the Moon God. Whether he tried to trick me, whether in his haste and nervousness he had made a mistake, or whether he did not know of their significance, I cannot say. But, in any case, my prompt rejection of the objects must have convinced him I was familiar with the ceremonial costume demanded.

AT last I was fully attired. In one hand I bore the double-headed serpent staff of turquoise mosaic, in the other the feather-woven basket containing the implements for blood-letting. I smiled to myself. As far as appearances went, I might have been the vitalized figure from a prehistoric Mayan monument.

The priest led the way once more. As we passed through another chamber, we were joined by a dozen or more young men in the tricolored robes of the Serpent God. In another, twenty virgins of the temple joined the procession, and with measured tread, with a low chant, with waving green plumes, we issued from the temple door and looked down upon the vast crowd beneath us.

Above our heads the temple walls and lofty roof-comb gleamed like molten gold in the rays of the sinking sun. Below us the plaza and the city were in dusky purple shadows. And in a great wave of sound the cheers of the people rose to us on the calm silent air of evening. Slowly we marched around the broad stone parapet. The acolytes and virgins prostrated themselves, and the priest halted and made obeisance before a short flight of steps that led to a huge sculptured altar above which towered a gigantic image of the Plumed Serpent, a lordly, imposing figure with benign bearded face gazing steadfastly into the east.

My heart pounded in my breast. Despite my every effort, I felt nervous, shaky, filled with forebodings. The moment had come. Could I go through with the plan I had formed? Could I dominate the priest and the others. Could I bluff it out? Then thoughts of Itza swept through my troubled brain. Somewhere below me, somewhere in that vast crowd, she and the prince were watching. For her sake, for her love, I must triumph. No longer did I hesitate. A great hush had fallen upon the scene. Not a sound broke the intense stillness. Stepping past the prostrate priest, I mounted the first step, faced the huge image above me, bowed, and at the top of my lungs shouted—in English: "Good evening, old fellow; what do you think of your self-appointed son, Kukulcan?"

I wheeled in time to see the priest glance up with an amazed, startled, half-terrified, half-incredulous expression. Never before had he or anyone present heard a word of English from my lips. To him, to all, it was utterly incomprehensible. It must be the secret ceremonial language of the cult of the Plumed Serpent! Below me, already dim in the shadows, the people were prostrate. Once more I shouted, this time in the Zutugil they understood, for I did not intend they should miss any of the events to follow. "Rise, O, people of Mictolan," I cried. "Rise and look upon the ceremony of the setting sun." Then, in English to impress them the more, I added, "And upon the setting of the priest here."

Slowly, half fearfully, the people rose and gazed upward towards where I stood.

Once more I turned and deliberately and confidently ascended the steps, until I stood directly before the immense statue, whose knees were on a level with my head. Then again I faced the priest. I am not a particularly religious man, I belong to no definite sect, but I respect faith and religion in others, no matter what its form. Regardless of their belief, of the fact that they were pagans, the people who had gathered about the temple were there to worship. To them the place whereon I stood was sacred. To them I was a holy being, a priest. My flippant words of a few moments before had been thoughtlessly uttered, had been the first words that came to my lips. But now I was upon the altar itself, upon a sacred spot, and nothing was farther from my mind than to be flippant, to be blasphemous, to desecrate the temple by word or act that, could my words be understood, would arouse the resentment of the people of Mictolan.

THEY had gathered to hear me give thanks to the gods; they should not be disappointed. Kneeling in sight of all, I repeated the Lord's Prayer and, to the best of my ability, gave fervant thanks to God for His mercies and prayed that He might guard and protect Itza and that He would not desert us in our time of need."

Then, feeling I had done my duty, I rose. The sun was sinking behind the mountains to the west, and I felt that I must bring the ceremonies to a prompt end —with a fitting climax. The time had come for me to assert myself, to humble the rascally, hideous old priest.

"Behold, O, Kinchi Haman!" I cried in Zutugil so that all might hear. "Behold, the sun sets; Kinich Ahau hides his face and visits the nether world and he goes without seeing his priest by the side of the son of Kukulcan. Did you not say you knew the ritual of the Plumed Serpent? Did I not warn you that there was much that you knew not? Did I not caution you to

make no mistake, to not fail to utter the right words? But you have done nothing, nothing but hide your face of Uayayab, the Poisoner of the Year. You have not joined in prayer, have made no move to render thanks unto the great Kukulcan. False thou art, false to your trust, false to your faith! But Kukulcan is ever merciful. Though he might well wreak vengeance upon you, yet will he be satisfied with less. He calls for the blood sacrifice, O, Kinchi Haman; for the blood of the priest of Kinich Ahau. Come hither and give the blood that he demands!"

Speechless, trembling, urged on by the jeers, the shouts of anger from the multitude, fearful of disobeying one who seemed on such familiar terms with the giant god, Kinchi Haman fairly crawled up the stairs to my feet.

Silently I handed him the basket with the thorn-covered cord, the obsidian knives, the golden bowl for sacrificial blood-letting. In the crimson light of the dying sun he looked like a fiend incarnate. But the eyes of the people were upon him. I stood beside him, stern, threatening. Above him towered the giant idol. With trembling hands he pierced his ears with the lancet, with sweat pouring from his brow he drew the sharp thorns of the cord across his tongue. In the golden salver he caught the dripping blood and, groaning with pain, he placed the offering at the feet of the great image.

"And now, O, Kinchi Haman," I shouted, "that thy repentance may be complete, remain here at the feet of Kukulcan until Kinich Ahau, Lord of Day, smiles upon Mictolan."

A thunderous cheer arose from the crowds below, and without glancing back at the disgraced, humiliated priest, I descended the steps, marched with the Virgins and acolytes to the temple door, removed my priestly garments and descended to the plaza to where Itza eagerly awaited me. My triumph was complete. If any member of the community had doubted my status before, all such doubts were dispelled. The very strangeness of my actions, the unexpected, unintelligible words I had spoken, and finally my treatment of their feared and hated pirest, had served to convince them that I was the son of Kukulcan. They were Indians, they reasoned in accordance with Indian psychology. Anything they did not understand must be supernatural, divine. My words in English were meaningless to them, therefore they must be understood only by the gods and their chosen priests. My ceremony of the setting sun was unlike any they had ever witnessed, therefore it must be the right one, and Kinchi Haman had been deceiving them. The priest had obeyed my orders, therefore I was the mightier, and he bowed to my superior wisdom and power.

And of all the people, perhaps the prince was the most amazed, the most impressed. As we walked towards the palace—for I had dismissed the litter-bearers—he was unusually silent and stared at me, a puzzled, incredulous expression on his face. But once we were alone with Itza in my quarters, he spoke.

"Itzimin," he exclaimed, "I cannot understand it. When I told you of the secret prophecy of my House and frankly said I knew you to be but a mortal and no son of the gods, you told me it was so. And now, Itzimin, you appear upon the temple, you speak the tongue of the sacred ceremonies, and Kinchi Haman humbles himself before you."

Itza, too, seemed greatly troubled and declared she was filled with sorrow at the thought that I might be other than an ordinary man.

I laughed at their serious looks and words, kissed away Itza's doubts, and reassured Azcopil. "You are both right and wrong, my brother," I told him. "As you well know, I am of another race than yours. Those of my race worship another God in other ways than yours. And the God of my people welcomes the prayers and the offerings of all, whether priests or not. Upon the temple of Kukulcan I gave forth the prayers that I and my people render to my God, and in the tongue we use. And Kinchi Haman bowed to me by the will of the God of my people, who is the greatest of all Gods."

Azcopil nodded. Then for a space he was silent, thinking deeply. Suddenly Itza lifted her head from where it nestled on my shoulder and smiled into my eyes. "Tell me, Itzimin, my beloved, of this God of your people," she begged. "Truly He must be great and good and powerful above all others. Did not Kukulcan permit you to worship this God of yours upon his altar? Did not Kinchi Haman tremble before Him? And you, Itzimin, are the best and greatest of men, so your God must be the best and greatest of gods, and I desire to know Him and to worship Him."

"Yes, Itzimin, tell us of your God," added the prince.

I am no theologian, and I fear I made a mess of trying to explain the tenets of the Christian faith to Azcopil and Itza. To people accustomed for generations to an involved mythology with a multitude of gods, a simple religion with a single God is a most difficult matter to comprehend. Moreover, the Zutugil tongue was woefully lacking in words to express my meaning or to describe many things in my religion. But that they grasped the fundamental principles, I was sure, when the prince spoke again.

"It seems, Itzimin," he said, choosing his words and speaking slowly, "that your God is like our Hunabku, the Invisible and Supreme One. To him all other gods bow. He rules all earth, heaven, the air, yet never is he seen. And like your God, who sent His son to walk upon earth and teach the people, so our Hunabku sent his son Kukulcan to walk among the Kitche Maya and to teach our father's fathers. So perchance, Itzimin, your God and the supreme god of my people may be the same, and I for one see little difference as to which one we worship, for both are the source of all things."

I nodded assent. I had no wish to try my hand at missionary work; to stir up religious questions was to stir up trouble, and trouble of any sort I desired above all else to avoid.

CHAPTER XIII

The Mystery of the Green Sphere

THERE was one man in Mictolan who had not been fooled by my involuntary rôle as a priest of Kukulcan. Old Nohul Voh chuckled over it when I next saw him.

"I know not what words you spoke, Itzimin Chac," he declared, "but that it was not the ritual of Kukulcan, I knew well. Neither did my lord carry out the ceremonies of the setting-sun as provided by my religion. Mayhap no man or woman of Mictolan knows how it should be done. Of a surety, Kinchi Haman does not know all. It is many Katuns since a true priest of the Itzaes held sway at the temple of Mictolan, and still longer since one of the Tutul Xius prayed at the altar of Kukulcan. But I, Nohul Voh, have looked upon the ceremony of the setting-sun in the holy city of the Plumed Serpents, in the temples of Chichen Itza, and I know the secret ritual as well as did Kachiquel Xius himself. But also I know my lord is not the son of Kukulcan and that the symbol of the Titul Xius upon his breast was placed there by my own hands. So between us two it will remain a secret, and it matters not, for it was foretold in the Book of the Future."

To relate all my conversations with the old sorcerer, to tell in detail all my moves, all my experiences, all my adventures and to describe all of my discoveries during the weeks that followed my triumph over Kinchi Haman, would be monotonous. Moreover, many were of little importance and finally, to tell the truth, I cannot for the life of me feel sure of the chronological order of the innumerable incidents nor the reasons and causes that led up to them.

The old priest seemed to have been completely squelched. I saw little of him and he was most servile and conciliatory when we met. But there was a fly in my ointment nevertheless. Once having taken the part, there was no way of getting out of it, and each night and each morning I was obliged to ascend to the temple and go through the ceremonies before the image of my supposed ancestor. Naturally, the ceremonies I inaugurated were most revolutionary, but as I found I was compelled to do something that savored of religion, I decided to do my best to carry out—as far as my limited knowledge permitted—the ritual of the Christian Church.

Perhaps, in fact undoubtedly, any priest or minister of any sect would have been most properly scandalized had he seen and heard me. I fear even good, jolly Padre José would have frowned upon me, for the services I conducted were a most hopeless hodge-podge of the Roman Catholic, the Episcopalian, the Congregational and half a dozen other denominations. From each I selected the most impressive and spectacular features I could remember, and if the good features of each did not bear fruit and win converts to the Christian faith, it was not the fault of my devotions, for I was very much in earnest, very serious and had no thought of sacrilege nor of burlesquing any church. And that the new form of religion appealed to the people was obvious, for the temple of Kukulcan became the favorite, and the attendance at the other temples fell off appreciably. But though this might previously have caused Kinchi Haman to writhe in anger, and to plan most horrible reprisals upon me, I now had little fear of him. In due time, and when Nohul Voh had approved of it, I had, quite as if by accident, managed to let the old rascal catch a glimpse of my chest, and by the manner in which he started and his eyes widened, I knew he had recognized the clan mark of the Tutul Xius, and that no longer did any doubt of my identity exist in his crafty old brain.

Much of my time I spent with the old sorcerer. He aroused not only my wonder and my curiosity, but my scientific interests as well, for I very soon discovered that Nohul Voh was a scientist in his way, a sage versed in lore unknown to the rest of the world and possessing secrets of nature that no other man had ever unlocked. If, as he claimed, he was actually centuries old, it is not surprising that he should have acquired vast knowledge, but, strangest of all, was the fact that his knowledge had been developed along entirely untouched and undreamed of lines. I must, however, qualify that statement somewhat. Rather, I should say, along lines that had been lost and forgotten in the dim past, for he assured me that, in the days of his youth, all the wise men or sorcerers of the Mayas had been familiar with principles and forces which he, the last of his clan of the sorcerers' cult, had perfected and developed. All, according to him, had been able to read the past and the future. And, so he told me, it was largely their reading of the future that had led to the fall of the Mayan Empire and the vanishing of their civilization. Being told that they were destined to be wiped out, that their empire would fall, they had become hopeless, bowed to destiny, and made no effort to struggle against fate.

"But how?" I asked him, "could they struggle against fate or the future if the future was to be? If they had struggled, if they had continued, then the reading of the future would have proved false."

He shook his head. No, he argued. In the first place the Book of the Future gave no time. It might have been ten or one thousand years they had to exist. And, in the second place, man, he said, speaking as he always did in parables—man struggled daily to live, to go on, though he knew ultimately he must die.

"Still, if your Book of the Future be true, then must it provide that the Kitche Maya were fated to give up the struggle," I argued.

"That is as it may be," he declared. "Even I do not know all there is to know of these matters."

Also, he confirmed my suspicion that the Mayas had been decimated by using the radioactive clay for etching their sculptures. Nearly all of those who handled the stuff, or the monuments, became afflicted with a terrible malady. They withered away, their teeth fell out, their bones dissolved and they died in agony. Some few survived for years; some, still fewer, recovered, mutilated and deformed but physically sound. Such, he declared, was Kinchi Haman. And, he added, all those who recovered possessed most warped, cruel, vindictive and ruthless natures. This, too had led to the downfall of the Mayas. Men, who had been humane, wise, benign rulers, seemed to go mad. They oppressed the people, ordered wholesale human sacrifices, made war upon one another. Fathers fought sons and brothers fought brothers. "But that," he sighed, "was foretold in the Book of Kukulcan, as was the City of Mictolan."

And, as I have said, the presence of the clay in the valley nearly resulted in the extermination of the people here. But though the radioactive mineral had brought death and destruction to the race, it had also brought great blessings in the end. They had learned that, combined with certain other substances, it was not only harmless, it was even beneficial. In the form in which it occurred in the rocks, it illuminated the caverns and the interiors of the temples, and even cast a soft half-light over the entire valley. And he, Nohul Voh, he declared, had learned to harness it, to make use of its power.

I WAS amazed, yet I had half-suspected this. I could not account for his sphere of gleaming light that illuminated his chambers except by the theory of radium. Yet it seemed incredible that these people, who had not even discovered the principle of the wheel, who knew nothing of iron, who had not even availed themselves of water power, and who possessed no machinery, no mechanical devices, could have mastered that powerful, elusive, terrible element—radium. Very painstakingly Nohul Voh tried to explain it to me. The harmless ore that occurred in the rocks and which, as nearly as I could determine, was a form of a uranium mineral, when placed near a rare green rock, would cause the latter to remain poised in air. He pointed to the mysterious green sphere as an example. "But," he continued, "no power could move the green mineral either closer to or farther from the material."

But he had discovered that, by placing rods of various metals near the green mineral the latter would move towards them and upon touching them would move to the next. Moreover—and this was so astounding I could scarcely believe his words—the green stone revolved at the same time, and made one complete revolution between sunrise and sunset and another between sunset and sunrise! To him, who studied the stars and the heavens and computed the eclipses and was responsible for the keeping of the calendars, this instantly presented possibilities. He had made a sphere of the green rock, had arranged it above a polished surface

on which astronomical computations and figures could be engraved, and had arranged rods at definite distances about the circumference. He had thus divided the day and night into fractions, and—by some remarkable coincidence—he had provided *twelve* of these rods so that the sphere, rotating at twice the speed of the earth touched the twelve rods in succession during each revolution or in other words made twenty-four contacts during the complete period from sunrise to sunrise.

But he had gone even farther. He had made calculations and measurements, had checked up accurately on his observations, and by patient experimenting and testing had converted his apparatus into a miniature solar system from which, at any time, he could determine the solstices, the eclipses, the positions of the planets and the constellations. All this was astonishing, almost incredible, but he demonstrated it before my eyes. Moreover, he knew that the earth was round! Reasoning backward from his model he had become convinced that the earth was a sphere, that the other celestial bodies were also spheres, and he was keen on learning from me what lay on the other surfaces of our earth.

But the most astounding, the most amazing feature of it was, that his device was, to all intents and purposes, perpetual motion. I tried to explain this to him, to make him understand the wonder of it, but he seemed to think it a matter of course. "Do not the sun, the moon, the stars move on forever? It is the law of the gods. Why then should not the green ball move on forever, ruled by the laws of the gods?"

I confess I could not find an adequate or satisfactory answer to this. Why not, to be sure?

Nevertheless, to me, who had always regarded perpetual motion, or to put it better, motion without loss of energy, as an impossible visionary thing, his endlessly rotating sphere was marvelous, fascinating. I examined it, studied it from every angle, but could make neither head nor tail of it. All I knew was that it was so. Why did it remain there, a definite distance above the radioactive mineral in the stone column? What was the invisible force that permitted the sphere to revolve and rotate freely and yet held it as firmly in position as though fixed by iron bars? And why, by what law of nature was the rotation of the sphere timed to precisely twice the speed of the earth?

It was inexplicable. But whatever the answer, here, in this force was a power that, properly applied, put to useful purposes, would revolutionize the mechanical world. But unless the principle could be learned, unless it could be understood and harnessed it was no more than an interesting toy. For hours, night after night, I lay awake, cudgelling my brains, formulating theories, striving to recall all I had ever learned of physics, electricity, chemistry and the other sciences; hoping somehow, by some means, to hit upon a principle or an hypothesis that would fit the conditions. And no sooner had I worked out some theory than I found it inadequate or faulty.

Eventually, however, I evolved an explanation that, I feel sure, was very nearly correct. This was that the principle involved was an atomic or rather electronic flow between the radium ore and the green stone! In a way, perhaps, akin to the flow of electrons between the filament and the plate of a radio tube. That the sphere of green was held in place by this stream of invisible electrons that formed a solid band of waves—something like magnetic waves—and that the green material being polarized was forced to rotate. Each time it touched a rod, a current or wave of electrons rushed back to the active mineral in the column and allowed the sphere to move forward towards the next rod. It was in fact on the principle of an electric motor, the radioactive material representing the electricity, the sphere the rotating armature, the upright rods the brushes. What a power this would be to put at the disposal of civilized man! No power needed to generate the primary force. No appreciable loss of the basic energy. No frictional loss of power or wear and tear. In my imagination I could picture the world's industries increased thousands of times, completely revolutionized by such a source of inexhaustible power.

I COULD visualize motor cars, ships, aircraft, trains speeding over land and sea and through the air without carrying fuel, with never a need of replenishing their power. I could see factories, mills, machinery of every kind operating without smoke, without waste. Grime, dust, ashes, coal and oil would be things of the past. It would be the greatest boon to mankind in the history of the world. And yet, unless I were vastly mistaken, it was an impossibility, a mere dream. Nohul Voh had told me that the green rock was extremely rare, that his sphere and a few small fragments were all of the mineral that existed as far as he knew, that these pieces had been handed down from father to son of his family for countless ages, and that their original source was unknown. Legend had it, however, that they were bits of a most sacred image that, in the very dawn of their history, had been worshipped by the first of the Kitche Mayas. Always, he declared, it had been credited with magical powers. Always, each sorcerer of his clan had prized it, guarded it; but only he had discovered its amazing properties. And probably, I thought, nowhere else but in this valley of Mictolan was there the peculiar radioactive mineral that was needed to produce the results.

But even if it were visionary, it was fascinating to speculate upon its possibilities, and, with my mind filled with it, constantly dwelling upon it, I began to wonder if the Bridge of Light was not also a variation of the same force. I questioned Nohul Voh, but he could give me little information.

Always, from the very beginning, he repeated, the Bridge of Light had been there—had not the Mayas crossed it when they had first entered the valley? And that it had some connection with the flames from the temple summit he felt sure, for always these rose, like banners against the sky, when the bridge spanned the chasm and vanished as the bridge vanished. Also, he felt sure, the high-priest knew the secret of the bridge—might even control it—but no one other than the Kinchi Haman himself was permitted within the innermost sacred precincts of the temple where dwelt the "Monster of Sacrifices," and so no one had ever learned the secret of the marvelous bridge. Even the sorcerer's ability to read the past and future, even his almost miraculous uncanny powers, had not enabled him to learn this secret of the high-priest.

"And what?" I asked him, "is this Monster of Sacrifices? Is he beast or man? I have vowed to destroy the thing and I would know more of it."

"That, my son, Itzimin, I cannot say," replied the old sorcerer. "Even when our fathers' fathers' fathers came unto Mictolan, a temple stood above the place and, so our legends say and so I heard from the priests who came hither and entered the temple, the monster dwelt therein and was tended by an ancient priest of another race more ancient than the Kitche Maya. It was his people who had made the great statue at the door of the Cave of the Bats; the mummies of his kings were those within that cave; his people had erected the temple, but he alone of all his race remained. To the high priest of Kinich Ahau he revealed all he knew—to him he delegated the care of the sacred Monster—and to him, no doubt, he imparted the secret of the Bridge

of Light. That, my son, is all I know. Even my knowledge, my powers, cannot pierce the walls and unmask the secrets hidden in the inner temple of the Kinich Ahau, God of Light and Life. To attempt to do so would be sacrilege, would bring down the wrath of the gods."

I smiled inwardly at the old fellow's psychology as related to his religion. "And yet," I reminded him, "you have no love for Kinchi Haman, you would humiliate him, destroy him. You deceive him by making him believe me a son of Kukulcan. Is that not also sacrilege?"

Nohul Voh shook his great white mane. "Nay, my son, the Kinchi Haman is but a man like ourselves. Outside his office he is an ordinary mortal—a most vindictive, cruel, undesirable mortal—and it is as a mortal I hate and despise him. But within the sacred precincts of his temple I would not raise my hand to do him harm."

"And," I persisted, "if Kinchi Haman should die—as die he must—or should be destroyed, who, O, Nohul Voh, would take his place?"

The sorcerer showed surprise at my question. "Why, you, my son!" he exclaimed. "Though the Kinich Ahau, Lord of Day, rules above all other gods in the heavens, yet Mictolan is a city of Kukulcan and herein the Plumed Serpent rules supreme. Though the priest of Kinich Ahau may not—rightly—become priest of Kukulcan—even though Kinchi Haman in his conceit and power did so contrary to law—yet the priest-head of the Tutul Zius may become high priest of Kinich Ahau. Aye, should Kinchi Haman pass on, you Itzimin Chac, would be supreme in all things in Mictolan."

"But I am no priest, I am not of the Tutul Zius clan, I am not even of the Kitche Maya," I reminded him.

"That matters not," he assured me. "Does not our history say that Kukulcan himself was of another race? Was not the first of the Tutul Zius house a warrior and not a priest? Is not my son the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan? And has not my son proved that he is inspired by the gods and gives a new ritual that is pleasing to the great Plumed Serpent?"

I laughed. "Still, O, Nohul Voh, I would be but a sorry priest of Kinich Ahau if Kinchi Haman died and left me not the secrets of the inner temple."

"To him who has much knowledge more will be given," declared the sorcerer with conviction. "Fear not, when the time comes the gods will impart to you the necessary wisdom."

HOWEVER, I had no intention of remaining in Mictolan even if I were fated to become its ruler, its high priest, the supreme head of the city and its people. At the first opportunity presenting itself, the moment the Bridge of Light spanned the chasm, I would flee with Itza and leave Mictolan forever, even if we were not married—that formality could be attended to when—if ever—we reached civilization. And, after our departure, the people could settle their religious and temporal affairs to suit themselves, though I hoped that the prince Azcopil would be restored to his throne.

That I had not already married Itza was not my fault or hers. I had discovered that only the high-priest could perform the ceremony, and Kinchi Haman refused to do so. She, he declared, had broken her vows as a Virgin of the Sun. She was to his mind, and in the eyes of the gods, an outcast, as far as religion was concerned, and as a priest of Kinchi Ahau he could not marry an excommunicant. To do so would be to insult his god. I threatened, argued, commanded, but though he trembled with fear, though he acknowledged my power, though he cowered and cringed, he was adamant.

"The Symbol," she cried. "See, Itzimin, there on the stone"

Perhaps the old villain was sincere in his stand; possibly in his innermost soul he really believed he was true to his faith. I am willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. But I felt that it was only a pose, that he was taking this means of revenging himself upon me, and I would willingly have killed him on the spot, if doing so would have helped matters any. But I knew—as he did also—that killing him would merely make matters worse. I would be his successor. I could not marry Itza to myself, for in the eyes of the law and of the people's faith, she was a Virgin of the Sun and could not wed a priest of the Sun, and unless I married her before I stepped into Kinchi Haman's shoes, she could never, legally, be my wife. She could, of course, become my concubine at any time, for as the priest of Kukulcan, I was entitled to acquire any and as many unmarried women as I desired without question or interference. But I had no desire or intention of availing myself of this opportunity, although Itza, accustomed all her life to the religion and the social laws of her people, was quite willing to sacrifice herself on the altar of our love. Hence the hideous old priest felt that, in this one matter, he could defy me in safety. But had I known what he was planning and plotting in his crafty, cruel brain; had I realized what was in store for us, and had I been more familiar with the laws and the religion, I would have put an end to him then and there, even though my act prevented my beloved Itza from ever being more than my mistress.

But even Nohul Voh could not read the thoughts of the priest—or if he could foresee the future in this instance, he refused to divulge it to me. So, telling Itza and Azcopil of my plans, I waited and watched for the reappearance of the Bridge of Light.

Repeatedly, too, I made my way to the chasm and spent hours examining the spot where the amazing bridge had spanned the abyss, hoping thereby to obtain some clue or inkling of the phenomenon, perhaps even to solve its secret. At risk of my life, I lay upon the very brink of the precipice, and leaning far over, examined the surface of the rock. But I could see no device, no apparatus that hinted at the origin or the operation of the miraculous thing. There was, however, a cavity or rather a group of small cavities a few feet below the verge of the cliff, and by listening intently, I could detect a peculiar hissing sound like escaping steam from within the holes. Also, I discovered that a draught or stream of air issued from them, for when I lowered a bit of rag attached to a cord, it was blown outward as though an immense fan was operating within the apertures in the rock.

That these holes and this jet of air had some connection with the bridge I felt sure, but rack my brains and puzzle my mind as I might, I could not see what the connection was or how a stream of light—even if it issued from the holes—could provide a firm span over which human beings could walk in safety.

Indeed, it seemed so utterly preposterous, so contrary to all laws of physics and of common sense, that at times I almost believed it was a figment of my imagination, that I had dreamed of it and actually had entered the valley by some other route. Yet Itza, the prince, Nohul Voh and everyone else knew of the Bridge of Light; with the exception of the sorcerer all regarded it as quite to be expected, as a supernatural manifestation, and no one, not even Nohul Voh, seemed to think it so very remarkable. In fact he and the others looked upon things that were everyday matters to me as far greater marvels than the Bridge of Light. Indeed, my own amazement, my own wonder that such an inexplicable thing as that span of light could exist was far less than their astonishment at such a simple matter as the wheel.

CHAPTER XIV

Innovations

AS I had agreed to do, I told Nohul Voh and taught him much in exchange for what he told me. And I have no doubt that he felt he had much the best of the bargain. He was fascinated, intensely interested in my descriptions of other lands upon the earth, of the great oceans, of other races and of our civilizations. Of course there was much of this that he could not grasp, because so many of our everyday affairs are based upon principles, mechanics and forces of which he was entirely ignorant. Not until I tried to explain matters to him did I fully realize this fact. I could not of course make him understand steam, electricity, the simplest forms of chemistry. I could not describe anything that depended upon iron or steel, for there were no words in his language for these common substances unknown to the Mayas. And I could not describe or make him understand our means of travel, our industries, our daily life, because all depended upon the principle of the wheel, and the wheel was unknown to him and his race. I drew sketches of various things—at which he was immensely delighted, for he, like all his race, was an excellent artist and could grasp the meaning, could visualize the reality of an object by means of a drawing. But though he thus acquired a perfect idea of the appearance of our houses, our people, our dress; our trains, boats, aircraft, motor cars and innumerable other objects, yet to him they were more than incomprehensible, more than impossible, because of the ever-present wheel.

The only way in which I could make matters clear was to give him a demonstration of this simple but most important of man's inventions, and I set about doing so. It sounds like a simple matter to make a wheel; but let my readers try to do so without the aid of a steel or iron tool—aside from a pocket knife—and see how simple it is! Here however, I must digress to call attention to the wonder that my knife had excited. My pistol, of course had been regarded with awe and terror; to the minds of the people it was the abode of a caged or captive god of thunder and lightning, and realizing fully the power it gave me and the fear it inspired, I had kept it hidden from sight in its holster. But my knife was a necessity. I used it constantly, and the people never tired of watching me use it, gazing with fascinated eyes as I cut a stick or pared my nails with the keen blade. Hence it had been a fairly simple matter to demonstrate the properties of steel to Nohul Voh.

But the wheel was a very different affair. Had I possessed a watch, I could have done so easily, but my watch had been lost somewhere in my wanderings—probably in my tumble down the crater as I fled from the man-eating dinosaur—and my entire possessions consisted of my knife, my pistol, my cartridges, my pipe and a lead pencil. Why I had not discarded my pipe, I cannot say. My tobacco had been exhausted weeks before I reached the valley, but still I had retained it. And I had been very glad that I had done so. The people of Mictolan were inveterate users of tobacco; they smoked both cigars and pipes, and only an old pipe smoker can appreciate the satisfaction, the enjoyment that I felt when, after weeks of forced abstinence, I again puffed away at my seasoned old briar.

But I am getting away from my story and the difficulties I met in trying to make the first wheel ever seen in Mictolan. The simplest method, I decided, was to cut a section of a log and fit an axle in its centre, a method used by many primitive and even civilized people. Even to cut a section of a log by means of stone and copper

tools, or by burning it off, was a laborious and slow operation. However, I decided that a model on a small scale would serve just as well, and selecting a stick of soft wood, I began whittling at it with my knife. I had cut about half-way through when a woman passed. As she stopped to look at me, gazing as always at my knife, I noticed that she was spinning cotton. The next instant I dropped my work and fairly roared with laughter. Why hadn't I thought of it before? The spindle she was using—the spindles every woman used—was a short, round stick with a hook at one end and a metal disk at the other. Here was a miniature wheel ready-made, even fitted to an axle! Telling the woman to bring me two of the spindles, I hurried her off, and as I waited for her return, I pondered on the strangeness of it all. For centuries—thousands of years, these people—as well as all other cultured American aboriginal races—had been using similar spindles—veritable wheels upon axles—and yet never in all those centuries, those tens of centuries, had anyone realized that the most important, the most basic of mechanical inventions was in daily use. It seemed almost incredible that the wheel should not have been discovered by accident; that sometime, someone dropping a spindle, should not have seen it roll and should not have grasped the principle. But I myself had failed utterly to grasp the possibilities of the spindles, even though I were familiar with wheels and had been cudgelling my brain as to how to make them. How many great and epochal discoveries might still remain, undreamed of, unrecognized, under our very eyes? Certainly, there seemed to me an endless supply.

MY thoughts were interrupted by the woman, who returned with the two spindles. I called to Nohul Voh, who was, as usual, busy among his herbs, and fitting both spindles on one stick, set the affair upon the ground and rolled it along. For a brief instant he and the woman stared at it with utter amazement. The next second they burst into shouts of delight, and, falling on his knees, the white-headed old sorcerer examined, rolled, turned and played with the thing like a child with a new toy.

But I was not finished. Two more spindles were secured; I attached a bit of wood to the axles, placed some stones upon it, and pushed the laden vehicle along. Never have I seen human beings more excited. They fairly shrieked with delight, trundled the crude thing back and forth, pushed each other aside in their eagerness to use it, and gabbled and chattered like magpies. Several passers-by stopped, people in nearby fields came hurrying to see what the excitement was about, and in a few minutes Nohul Voh's house was surrounded by a crowd of excited, jabbering, laughing, marveling people.

However, once they had grasped the idea of the wheel, they lost no time in putting it into use.

Within twenty-four hours there was scarcely a man or woman or even a child—in the whole of Mictolan—who did not have a wheeled vehicle of some sort. At first they made only miniatures, copying precisely the crude thing I had made, but with a little aid and instruction they learned that size had nothing to do with the new wonder, and carts and wheeled barrows of useful, practical size began to appear. And never have I found greater interest or greater amusement and pleasure than in teaching the people the innumerable useful purposes which the wheel would serve. I showed them how to pivot the front axle of four-wheeled carts, how to grease the axles, how to use mill-wheels or arastras for grinding their giant maise, and I even taught them the principle of the block and tackle and of the windlass. And always they showed the greatest interest.

THEN came my greatest triumph—a wind-mill. To be sure, my first was a mere model set up on a post close to Nohul Voh's home, and it called upon all my patience and ingenuity to make this. It was merely a toy, but to Nohul Voh and his people it was the most astonishing thing ever seen. For hours at a time they would stand entranced, watching it whirl in the breeze, swinging from side to side as the wind veered; wrapt in silent wonder at the thing. The old sorcerer, moreover, was the most fascinated of all. He could make nothing of it; the source, or rather the principle of its motion was as inexplicable to him as his green sphere had been to me, and I marveled that a man of such superior intelligence and wisdom should not be able to reason out the puzzle. But it was in perfect accord with all matters pertaining to these people.

Probably no race in the world's history presented more contradictory, paradoxical and mysterious features than the Mayas. How or why did the race develop the most perfect arithmetical system the world has ever known, invent and perfect a calendar by means of which any date could be definitely fixed within a space of more than five million years, and devise a written language, perhaps the most remarkable in the world, and yet fail utterly to discover the most elemental facts of chemistry, mechanics and other sciences? The Mayas of Mictolan had of course gone a great deal farther. They had learned to use the radium ores; Nohul Voh had created a marvelous miniature solar system; they—or their priest rather—had, as I had reason to believe, learned the secret of that amazing Bridge of Light, and Nohul Voh could either read one's thoughts or could actually look into the past and future. But, as far as I could see, not one of these strange and truly marvelous things was of the least practical value to the people. They still tilled their field with crooked sticks and stone-tipped implements, they still wove their cotton on crude hand looms, they still performed all labor by hand and, aside from the nobles, the priests and the favored few, not a man nor woman in the valley could either write or read their races' characters. But I intended—provided I was forced to remain long enough in Mictolan—to change all this. I would erect windmills, would make water-wheels, would manage to build simple machinery and would see what happened. And in doing this, I would enlist the cooperation of Nohul Voh and of Azcopil.

I tried to explain my ideas to the old sorcerer, and I was amazed to find how quickly he grasped the matter. Once the mechanical side of his brain was aroused, he was as apt a pupil as one could wish. He might have puzzled his brains for years before he discovered how the windmill worked, but it didn't take him three minutes to master the principle once I explained it to him. And he was an excellent mechanic, as was Azcopil. Indeed, like most Indians, the Mayas of Mictolan were born artizans and most painstaking workers. Moreover they could perform wonders and produce miracles with their crude, inefficient, primitive tools.

Very rapidly a six-foot windmill grew into being under my guidance, and while a vast amount of patience and perseverance was needed before I succeeded in getting the rods, cranks and other portions of its mechanism made from copper, silver and even gold, yet the final result was beyond my expectations.

I had given no little thought to what sort of a machine I would install for a demonstration of wind power. A pump was the simplest, of course, but on the other hand a mill of some sort—a pair of roller crushers for corn and cane or a pair of stones for grinding maise, would be more impressive and useful. But there were serious obstacles in the way of constructing these. They would require gear-wheels and gears were out of

the question. I finally decided that the pump was the only feasible apparatus.

To be sure a pump was not greatly needed. The stream ran past the town, and ollas or pots on the women's backs had served every purpose for transporting water for centuries. Still a town pump was not a bad scheme, and as the breeze blew continually across the valley, it would seldom fail. So the wind-mill was set up near the stream, the pump—a crude affair that would have brought roars of laughter from any real mechanic—was rigged up, and as the last connection was made and the big wheel began to revolve, the entire population fell upon their faces and made obeisance to what to them seemed actuated by the gods. And when, a few moments later, a stream of water began to gush from the pump's spout, pandemonium broke loose. Pushing, shoving, struggling, laughing, splashed with water, the women milled and crowded to fill ollas and jars at the miraculous stream brought by the power of the God of Air from the river to their doors. Like children they filled their vessels, emptied them and refilled them for the mere delight of watching the water come gurgling into the earthenware jars. But in a few hours the novelty wore off, the pump became as much a part of their everyday life as anything else, and though the windmill was always spoken of as Mulac, or the God of Wind, and although offerings of flowers and fruits were placed at its base each day, yet apparently the people never actually regarded it as a god or deity.

THE windmill was such an immense success that I determined to build a water-wheel. This was a far more ambitious undertaking, but I was glad indeed to have something to occupy my time and mind, for the weeks and months were passing, and I seemed no nearer making my escape from the valley than when I entered it, and I was getting more and more impatient to have Itza as my bride. Moreover, the old priest troubled me not a little. Frequently he asked, a crafty expression in his wicked eyes, when I planned to lead the people forth as provided in the prophecy. But I put an end to this query by suggesting that, if he was so anxious to have the prophecy fulfilled, he should ask his gods to restore the Bridge of Light so that they might pass out of the valley. I saw him give a start when I said this. Evidently he feared that I had guessed that he controlled the bridge, but he quickly recovered himself and promised to ask his god. But I was now thoroughly convinced that, from the first, he had feared I might lead the people from the valley and had cut off the bridge to prevent my doing so. I could scarcely believe that he wished to prevent *me* from leaving by myself. He had every reason to want to be rid of me. But I did not know the old rascal, had no conception of his mental processes, and never suspected the lengths to which he would go to attain something which compared to other things would seem a matter of little importance.

But by keeping myself occupied with my mechanical work, I managed to forget other troubles, to put the old priest's hateful presence from my thoughts, and to make time pass more quickly. Moreover, I had Itza with me constantly, for at my suggestion, Azcopil had taken up his residence with his wife and sister in the palace; Itza and the Princess Mitchi Ina had become inseparable, and we were a happy and intimate household.

But to return to the water-wheel. As there was an abundance of water and a natural fall where the stream tumbled over a six-foot ledge, I decided to construct a back-pitch wheel as being the simplest. Nearly two weeks were consumed in the construction of the wheel itself, but in the end I had the satisfaction of looking upon a water wheel such as no human eyes had ever before seen. Its metal fastenings, the heavy bands about its wooden axle, the collars that secured the spokes in place, were of solid silver and its thirty-five buckets or paddles were of gold!

Meanwhile work on the wooden gears and the massive stone rollers had been going on, and by the time the heavy, cumbersome wheel was set up, the various units of the mill itself were complete. I had no intention of using wooden gear-wheels, but meant merely to employ the wooden ones as patterns with which to make moulds for casting metal gears. For this purpose I used an alloy of copper and silver—a sort of bronze—which was used by the natives for many purposes, and which was the hardest metal obtainable in the valley.

All went well and when, the sluice-way having been opened, the great wheel commenced ponderously to revolve and the gears meshed and rumbled and I fed a bundle of cane stalks into the rollers and the juice streamed out into the waiting trough, the ovation accorded the seeming miracle exceeded my wildest expectations. The people seemed actually to have gone mad. They fought merely to bathe in the water that flowed from below the wheel, they struggled for the privilege of sipping the muddy juice that flowed from the rollers; they cast flowers, fruits, even their most prized possessions into the sluice-way. Even the prince and Itza, who knew it was nothing more than a thing of wood and metal, were awed and made obeisance to it, while old Nohul Voh, who had had a hand in its construction and understood it perfectly, held up his arms, threw back his leonine mane and shouted praises and thanks to Chac Mool, the God of Waters, for so manifesting his favor to the people of Mictolan.

Even old Kinchi Haman had come to witness the new marvel, but no pleasure, no delight, no surprise showed upon his horrible features. His eyes burned, I saw his hands clench and unclench, and I knew that my success had only added to his hatred and his jealousy. But Kinchi Haman was no longer of any great importance to anyone. The people who had formerly feared him seemed no longer in dread of him. His temple was almost deserted when he held his ceremonies, few even made obeisance to him. Ever since I had humiliated him at the temple of Kukulcan, he had lost prestige, respect, the power to instill fear or obedience. I could not blame him for detesting me, for feeling jealous, and I rather pitied him. But it was his own fault. Had he been reasonable, decent, existing conditions never would have occurred. From the first he had been tyrannical, overbearing, threatening and jealous.

But neither the people nor myself had time to bother our heads over the priest. The people had gone mechanics mad. Wonderful imitators that they were, they worked like beavers making windmills and water-wheels for themselves, and in an incredibly short time, the valley was dotted with windmills; at every available point on the river and its tributaries a water-wheel rumbled and ground; hand-carts and barrows were trundled through the streets and across the fields, and I was besieged with requests, prayers and supplications to show new wonders to the people. As I gazed across the valley and saw these signs of a dawning use of labor-saving devices, I chuckled at my own thoughts.

WHAT an incongruous, paradoxical situation it was, to be sure. Here were the people, going mad with excitement over the most primitive forms of utilizing the most obvious forces of nature, while all about them, unnoticed, undeveloped, were forces ten thousand times more powerful, more economical, and which would have caused as much excitement in the outside world as did the crude wind and water engines in this hidden

valley. Would these people, I wondered, ever learn to adapt the strange unknown forces of radium to mechanical needs? In years to come, would they go through the long, slow evolution of wind, water, steam, electricity, and in the end discover the terrific forces so long neglected? Would some future Mictolanian rediscover the inventions of old Nohul Voh and resurrect his name and immortalize the ancient sorcerer as the greatest scientist of his race? Would his discoveries be lost and forgotten? Or would some brilliant genius stumble upon the natural forces of the valley, solve the problem of controlling and using them and, in a single day—figuratively speaking—jump his people ages ahead of all other races?

Who could say? Who could foretell what might happen? Possibly old Nohul Voh. But when I half-jokingly asked him if his Book of the Future had foretold the wheels and the mills he shook his head and admitted it had not.

"The Book of the Future holds only those things to do with the race of the Kitche Maya," he said. "These things are of another race. As I could read nothing of your past ere you spoke with Katchilcan, as I could read nothing of the future beyond the end of the road of the symbols, neither could I read of these things that dwelt within the mind of a man of another race."

I smiled. "You draw a fine line, O, Nohul Voh," I said. "Though these things are, as you say, of my race, yet now they have to do with your people, so they should have been told to you in your Book of the Future." "Who can say," he replied. "It is the will of the gods." And he admitted freely that he could not foretell what I next planned to do.

I had noticed that there was iron ore in the valley and there was also lime. I had no doubt I could build a furnace and smelt the ore, but there was a simpler method. The natives had smelted copper, gold and silver for countless ages. Whenever they had done so, they had of necessity smelted a small quantity of iron at the same time, for all their ores contained iron. In the bottom of every crucible of the other metals, there must have been a tiny iron button, and why or how they had overlooked these bits of the much harder and more useful metal was a puzzle I could not explain. But that the iron was there I felt sure, and an examination of the broken clay crucibles and slag that had accumulated, confirmed my suspicions.

It was slow work picking over the heaps and separating the iron nodules, but I employed boys to do it, and so greatly were they impressed with everything I had done, that they looked upon the tedious work as the greatest privilege and vied with one another to secure the greatest quantities of the desired metal. Once I had obtained a fairly adequate supply, the rest was simple. The iron was easily refined, welded and forged, and to my surprise and delight I discovered that, due to the presence of some other metal, no doubt—the resultant was an excellent steel capable of taking a good temper and edge.

But I was bitterly disappointed at the reception the new metal received. Gold, silver and copper had answered every need of the people for countless generations. They had not lived long enough in a mechanical age to appreciate the value of a harder metal. They had long ago given up sculpturing rocks and had substituted painted decorations, and though the new iron tools were immeasurably superior to anything they had known for cutting wood, yet they did not impress the people as either remarkable or wonderful. To be sure they took to them readily enough, but they looked upon them as a matter of course. No doubt this was largely because they realized that the iron, like the other metals, was a natural product of the earth, whereas the mills and wheels were the product of man. But at any rate I felt I had done the people a good turn, and moreover, I made good use of the iron myself.

I had, of course, been planning and preparing for my escape. I had accumulated torches and a store of parched corn to serve Itza and myself on our journey, and now, with iron at my disposal, I could provide myself with efficient weapons. My pistol must be reserved for emergencies—I had only a dozen extra cartridges left—and I busied myself making iron arrow-heads, spear-heads, a couple of light axes or hatchets and a machete or sword. Bows and arrows were in universal use and I had learned to use them as well as the Indians, so I felt that I was well equipped. But my hardest job was to fashion fish-hooks. I had always looked upon fish-hooks as simple things and had never given a thought as to how they were made. But when I came to try my hand at it, I realized that a fish-hook is, in its way, a masterpiece. Of course, if I had possessed wire, my task would have been much simpler, but with bar steel I had my work cut out for me. However, in the end, I managed to make some barbed objects that might have passed for fish-hooks, and having tested them out in the stream and found them efficient, I felt perfectly satisfied.

FOR the first time in my life I began fully to realize what a vast advance had been made when man stepped from the bronze to the iron age, and how each step in man's progress had made the next step easier and greater. When at last I had made steel, I could foresee machinery, steam engines, yes, even electricity, and in my day dreams I could visualize the valley humming with industry, with mills, factories, perhaps a railway and even motor propelled vehicles. Anything seemed within the bounds of possibility, and only patience and time were needed to make such visions come true. But time was what I most sincerely hoped I would *not* have.

And, after all, I wondered, would such things really be a blessing or a curse to the people? Were they any better off, any happier with their wheeled vehicles, their wind and water power than they had been before? I could not see that they were. Their every need, every want had been fully satisfied; their lives had been busy, happy, content, and I could not for the life of me see whereby I had in the least degree added to their happiness and well-being by teaching them what I had. But I must qualify that.

One thing I had shown them—perhaps the simplest of all—had undoubtedly benefited them. This was the means of making fire by flint and steel. Hitherto their only means of kindling fire had been by patiently rubbing two sticks together by means of a bow-drill, and the primitive flint and steel was a veritable godsend to them.

I had thought, when I first demonstrated the method, that they would regard it as a divine or supernatural thing, but I was vastly mistaken. The stone and the metal were natural products, and while they marveled at my ability or superior knowledge in knowing how to produce fire by striking the two together, they accepted it much as they had accepted iron.

It must not be thought that I devoted all my time and energies to my experiments and mechanical contrivances. I had my religious duties to attend to, I explored the valley—and in so doing proved to my satisfaction that there was no egress other than by the Bridge of Light; I visited and talked with the people, I spent many hours with Nohul Voh, and, of course, I devoted much of my time to Itza. She was very anxious to learn my language, and she, like all her race, being a born linguist and exceedingly quick to learn anything,

proved a most apt pupil and rapidly learned to speak, read and write English. Very delightful were the hours I devoted to teaching her, reproving her for her mistakes by kisses, laughing merrily with her over her funny efforts to pronounce the new sounds, guiding her little fingers as she tried to form the various strange characters.

It was a wonderful satisfaction, too, to be able to converse with Itza in a dialect that no one else could understand; to be able to exchange our thoughts, our hopes, our desires and to make love without others overhearing us. Moreover, the fact that she could understand and converse in the strange language, which the people implicitly believed was the secret dialect of the Tutul Zius, raised Itza tremendously in the estimation of her people. To them, she was now semi-divine. She was the chosen mate of the son of Kukulcan, she conversed in the language of the gods, she could read the magic, sacred writing of Itzimin Chac, and she was accorded the homage, the respect and the reverence due a queen and a goddess. We wanted for nothing, there was no earthly reason why I should not have been happy, content, willing to remain forever in the lovely valley with Itza.

I had no kith or kin in the outside world; among my own people I would be forced to struggle, to work in order to maintain even a modest existence; I would be but a rather obscure unit among millions of my fellows; I could never hope for great wealth, position or prominence. Here in Mictolan my life was easy, work was rather a recreation than a necessity; I had everything man could ask—wealth, position, power, and, most precious of all, a loving devoted and most beautiful companion. Why could I not be content, satisfied to remain here, to accept conditions as they were, to forget the outside world, to resign myself to remaining the virtual ruler of these lovable, peaceful, simple people? It was not that I lacked anything, that I was not happy, that I could not marry Itza. I had long since cast the obstacle of that formality aside as an unreasonable, nonsensical and illogical impediment to our happiness. The ceremony of the priest—even had he been willing to go through with it—would have had no true significance to me or to my people; even had we been married according to the rites of the Mictolan faith, I should have wanted a Christian wedding if we ever escaped from the valley. Arguing to myself along these lines, I scrapped all my obsolete, old, narrow-minded, puritanical ideas aside and took Itza for my bride by the simple Scotch custom of declaring her my wife in the presence of the prince and the princesses, and subsequently announced it from the temple.

So I had no valid reason, no excuse for wishing to leave the valley. Indeed, strive as I might to analyze my mind, to psychoanalyze myself, I could not discover why I still longed to return to my own people, my own country. And yet I did. I was uneasy, discontented, and chafed at my enforced stay in the valley. But such is human nature. I had gone through hardships, sufferings, dangers, to find Mictolan. I had succeeded. I had found love, happiness—everything man longs for, strives for and holds dear—and yet I was as anxious to get away from the place as I had been to reach it. Possibly it was merely the inherited, ineradicable homing instinct of human beings. Perhaps some sixth sense warned me of impending disaster, or it may be that my scientific instinct, my desire to give the world the benefit of my discoveries was at the bottom of my unrest. However that may be, always, at the back of my brain, was the desire, the longing to escape, and not an hour passed that I did not glance, expectantly, at the temple, hoping each time to see the lambent fire that would mark the time for my safe passage with Itza.

CHAPTER XV

Nohul Voh's Warning

I HAD begun to think that the Bridge of Light had vanished forever. That as soon as I had appeared as the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan, the amazing span had ceased to exist, or that old Kinchi Haman—if as I suspected he controlled it—had some ulterior motive in preventing me or anyone else from leaving the valley. Although I had seen so many inexplicable and incredible happenings, although I had had indisputable proofs of the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies, I had not yet become so convinced of their inspired origin or so weaned from my faith in hard and fast scientific facts, that I could accept matters as did the Mayas.

Although I did not pretend—even to my own mind—to explain many things, especially the Bridge of Light, yet not for a moment did I believe it supernatural. Either it was some natural, if inexplicable and entirely new, phenomenon, or else it was some equally inexplicable device of man.

In the first case it must be subject to natural laws; in the second it must be operated, produced by some one possessing its secret. Everyone agreed that the phenomenon had appeared and disappeared repeatedly in the past, hence if it were a natural thing there was every reason to believe that it would continue to appear and vanish. If natural and controlled by nature's forces, then the fact that it had ceased to exist just after I arrived was merely a coincidence. Moreover, if natural, and if it followed the ordinary and accepted laws of natural phenomena, there was every reason to expect that the periods of its existence and non-existence would be definite, well-established cycles. On the other hand, if it were a man-made and man-operated thing, it had unquestionably been cut off purposely as soon as I had passed over it, and its periods of existence in the past would have been, in all probability, irregular and erratic.

I was surprised that I had not thought of making a systematic study of its past, but I would lose no time in doing so now. Neither the prince, nor Itza, nor the princesses could give me any definite information on the matter, but old Nohul Voh, I felt sure, would be able to help me. We had become very friendly, really chummy in fact, and he had long before cast aside his assumed shell of mystery, and had been remarkably frank with me in regard to his knowledge and his powers. Only on the matter of his Book of the Past and Book of the Future, as he called them, was he reticent. He would divulge nothing of this matter, but I had become convinced that this was because of his inability to explain it rather than because of disinclination.

In fact, I firmly believed that—as I had thought in the beginning—it was some form of hypnotism, mental-telepathy or mind-reading, which was as much a mystery to him as to anyone else, but that rather than admit that he did not understand it, he pretended it was a secret he could not reveal. However, in all other matters he was frank with me. His mysterious sphere he had explained to the best of his ability, though even this was a mystery to him. Naturally he knew nothing of the atomic theory, of electrons, of ether waves, and hence he could not readily grasp the theory I had formulated to account for it. He had stumbled upon the force, had adapted it to his uses, and there he had stopped. It was the same with all his other knowledge and discoveries.

He possessed a vast knowledge of medicinal herbs, but he had no conception of chemistry. He extracted curative salts and drugs from earths and minerals but he could not explain their nature, was entirely ignorant of the difference between acids and alkalis and he knew

nothing of the laws and theories of chemical reactions. He had discovered that the radioactive mineral, in combination with certain ores, emitted a brilliant, apparently perpetual light, but he was unaware that the light was the result of the decomposition of the metallic element, radium.

And his most uncanny and seemingly supernatural power, that of appearing to fade and float through the air, was utterly inexplicable, he admitted. It was a trick or a power which, he claimed, had been inherited for countless generations by his clan; it was, so he declared, purely mental and not mechanical nor chemical, and though possibly—for I am broad-minded enough to admit there are more things in heaven and on earth than any scientist has dreamed of in his philosophy—it may have been the Indian Yogi's alleged power to transport themselves bodily for any distance, yet I believed and still believe it to be some form of hypnotism. He admitted that he could not perform the seeming miracle, except under certain conditions and in certain environments, and I mentally classed it with the rope-climbing, dismembering and mango-growing tricks of the Hindoo fakirs.

But regardless of all this, in spite of the fact that the old sorcerer was, scientifically speaking, as ignorant as any of his people, still he was a veritable storehouse of the history, the traditions, the legends and the records of his race. That he was extremely old was certain. That he had discovered the elixir of perpetual youth, as he claimed, seemed quite possible and even probable, when I looked upon his youthful face, his active muscular body and his snow-white hair. That he had always looked exactly the same, from the time of the earliest recollections of the oldest inhabitants of Mictolan, all agreed, and all declared also, that he had been the same in the days of their fathers and their fathers' fathers *ad infinitum*. But I knew, from long experience, how difficult, almost impossible, it is to disentangle fact and fiction in Indian traditions and memories, and whether he was a century or ten centuries of age, I could not hazard a guess.

HOWEVER that might be, there was no question that he had been the official keeper of the Mayan records, the astronomer, the soothsayer, the sage, the historian of the people of Mictolan for innumerable years. He had explained his method of making astronomical observations through the carefully calculated and accurately placed slits in his tower, and I had been astounded at his deep knowledge of the planets, the constellations and the celestial universe. Though, as I have said, he had adapted his green sphere apparatus to serve as a working model of the earth and its rotation, orbit and relation to the planets, and from this was able to work out problems by which he checked up on the Mayan calendar, yet he verified his calculations by observations of the heavenly bodies, and by the crudest and simplest of instruments.

And he proved conclusively to me, that the results were amazingly accurate. The Mayan calendrical system, as I already knew, was perhaps one of the greatest achievements of any race, and was considered superior to anything of the sort previous to that in use by ourselves at the present time. But I had never before fully realized how truly astonishing it was, the more especially in view of the manner in which it was worked out and checked for errors. To read of a thing, to see characters, dates and figures cut in cold stone, is one thing; but to stand beside a living man of a supposedly-vanished race, and have him explain and demonstrate the same facts, is quite another.

As old Nohul Voh patiently explained the meaning and the calculations of the twenty Mayan days and their names, the solar year of 360 days, with the addition of the five "unlucky days" or *Uayeb*, and the relationship of the divine year or Tonalmatl with the civic year, matters that had been confused and hazy before became clear and simple. It was the same with the Calendar Round and the Initial Days of the years, the Tuns, Katuns and Baktuns, the Long Count and the system of numerical glyphs. And his method of using the planet Venus for checking up on his observations was astounding and intensely interesting. By observing the periods elapsing between the appearances of this planet as the morning star, Star-periods of almost precisely 584 days—he knew that when the planet had appeared five times its appearance should tally with the eight years of 365 days each of his calendar. His arithmetical method of working out the Venus and calendrical coincidences was truly remarkable, both for its accuracy and its simplicity, and as I watched him, I began to appreciate the superiority of the Mayan vigesimal system over our decimal system, and realized how non-essential were the complicated higher mathematics employed by our scientists and astronomers.

Taking the Venus period or cycle of 584 days as a basis, he divided it by the twenty day signs of the Mayan month which gave him twenty-nine with a remainder of four. Hence every Venus cycle ended with a day-sign four days later than that preceding it. Then, dividing twenty by the four, he found five day signs were enough to serve as symbols for the terminations of Venus-cycles, and as the day signs were always combined with numerals from one to thirteen, and as thirteen divides 584 with a remainder of twelve, the terminal day of each Venus cycle was recognizable by its number being one less than the preceding one. Hence, as he pointed out, five times thirteen, or 65 Venus-cycles, must elapse before the same day name and number symbol could recur as an ending date to a Venus-period. Thus 65 Venus-cycles would equal two calendar Rounds of 52 years each or 104 years, and once in 104 years the Venus Count, the Calendar Count, and the Year Count would coincide to a day and hour.

All of this dissertation on Nohul Voh's astronomical knowledge and ability may appear to have no connection with my anxiety to find the Bridge of Light once more streaming across the chasm that barred escape from Mictolan. But, as a matter of fact, it had a most important bearing upon the matter. A man who nightly studied the heavens, who kept all the calendrical records, must, I believed, have observed when and how often and for how long a period the tell-tale flames from the great temple of the sun had flared against the sky.

He could scarcely have avoided doing so, and his memory was so remarkable, that I felt sure that even if he had not recorded the dates of the occurrences, he could recall them. So, filled with my new scheme of establishing some definite facts regarding the incredible bridge, I hurried to the old fellow and explaining my ideas and theories, asked if he could give me information or data bearing on the subject.

"My son," he said, after a moment's thought, "from the very beginning of time the Bridge of Light must have spanned the chasm. Does not the Book of Kukulcan speak of it? When I, a youth, came to Mictolan with those others who founded the city, we crossed the Bridge of Light, as I have said, and found the fires coming from the ancient temple wherein was that last priest of a vanished people. Ever since that distant time the Bridge of Light has come and gone, as no doubt it came and went for ages before the survivors of the Empire of the Great Serpent came unto Mictolan. In my mind the times of its coming and its going are not fixed. To me it meant nothing. But much that has fled my memory during the Katuns that have passed have been set

down by me, for who knows when the word let fall in jest may prove the greatest truth? Who can say that the stone tossed carelessly in air may not bring down the winging bird? Who can foretell that the seed, dropped by mischance, may not bring forth the greatest yield of grain? Perchance, among my records and my writings, I may find that which, noted and forgotten as of no worth, may be the answer that you so much desire."

Rising, he bent over a pile, made up of papyrus covered with the picture symbols and characters, of clay tablets and slabs of thin stone bearing the familiar cartouches of Mayan inscriptions and dates, and of strips of bark-cloth on which were mystic figures, diagrams and drawings.

"And will not your Book of the Past tell you more readily what you seek?" I asked, half-jestingly.

He shook his head. "Nay, Itzimin Chac," he replied. "The Book of the Past, even as the Book of the Future, deals not with matters here in Mictolan. Never do they reveal events within this valley. Why, I do not know. When you gazed upon the magic smoke and saw the road of the symbol you saw nothing of the valley, nothing of the Bridge of Light. When I watched you coming hither I saw nothing of your arrival after you entered the Cave of the Bats. All within the valley is black. Could I but see into the future or the past here in Mictolan, then, my son, would I know at what time the Bridge of Light would again give footing for my lord's passage with his bride; then would I know the secret of the Bridge of Light; then could I see the Monster of Sacrifices, and then, my son, could I see what the Kinchi Haman plots and plans for your downfall and could warn you. But all within the valley is hidden from my sight. Ah, here, my son, is what I seek."

ALTHOUGH Nohul Voh had kept no consecutive records of the phenomenon he had mentioned, the appearance of the flames from the temple at various times—no doubt he had found they interfered with his observations and had cursed them roundly at the time—and with a little calculation he was able to fix their dates beyond any question. For a number of years, as nearly as we could judge, the appearances and disappearances of the Bridge of Light had been almost uniform. The temple flames would appear, would flare steadily for forty days (two Mayan months) and would subside for thirty-two days.

Then came a record where for six months or 120 days they had burned steadily.

"I remember the time now," declared Nohul Voh. "See, the date is 2 Ahau 13 Tzec 2 Ahau. We took it for a sign that the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan was on his way; but I gazed into the Books of the Past and Future and saw him not."

"Two Ahau, 13 Tzec 2 Ahau!" I made a swift mental calculation. Good Lord! That was somewhere between A. D. 220 and 240! Impossible! Over sixteen hundred years ago! The old fellow was romancing; he could not—no living man could have been alive then.

But he was speaking again. "And then," he went on, studying his tablets, "for twenty Tuns (years) no light burned above the temple, and I, who know the secret writings of the prophecy, knew that the messenger of Kukulcan would never come unto Mictolan, for the appointed time had passed."

"Great Scott!" I thought to myself, "the old fellow actually believes he was alive then." For, up to that time I had never really taken his tale of extreme age seriously. Rather I regarded it as a sort of allegorical statement, a way of implying that he did not know his own age, that his clan or profession had always existed among the Mayas.

"And yet once more, the Bridge appeared," he continued. "And for long it spanned the chasm, and Maidens of Kinich Ahau were kept ever on guard to welcome the bearer of the symbols. But it came and went, always irregularly, though always the flames blazed from the temples upon the coming of the moon of the spring Tonalmatl. Nay, my son, not once has it failed to appear upon that date. Well I know, for that day to me is most important in my observations, and always upon that night the moon is dimmed and the night brightened by the flames from the temple. Well do I have cause to remember that, my son. And so, though you may feel that the Bridge of Light has gone forever, yet would I prepare myself and hold myself in readiness for its coming, for upon the eve of the Tonalmatl it will once more span the chasm to the Cave of the Bats."

I had learned nothing, I knew no more than before—unless I believed in the certainty of the bridge appearing at the Tonalmatl moon. Whether it was a natural phenomenon or a device whose secret was known only to the priest was still a mystery. If Nohul Voh's records were right, it had appeared and disappeared in regular cycles at one time and so might have been natural, but on the other hand it had afterwards become most erratic.

Personally, I had no great faith in the Bridge of Light putting in its appearance at the time of the Spring Festival, the beginning of the Religious Year. But the sorcerer seemed confident of it, and at all events I was ready and waiting. Then I recalled his other words—what he had said about Kinchi Haman plotting my downfall and warning me. Strange how the rascally priest was forever cropping up to trouble me. I had almost forgotten he existed, and now Nohul Voh's vague hints brought him vividly to my mind.

What did the sorcerer know? What did he suspect? What did he mean? I felt quite certain that he knew or suspected a great deal more than he had told me.

But in that case, being a friend of mine and an acknowledged enemy of Kinchi Haman, why didn't he tell me all he knew or guessed? And what could Kinchi Haman do, after all? He didn't amount to a row of pins in the estimation of the people, I felt certain. He dared not bring down their wrath by injuring me personally, I felt convinced. And I gave him credit for having enough acumen and enough knowledge of my intentions to know that I was as anxious to get away from the valley, as he was to be rid of me. If he had any control over the Bridge of Light all he had to do was to start it going and he'd never set eyes on me again.

How could I be sure he was not up to something? I had no means of knowing how many secret followers he had—even in his vast temple and its associated palaces, monasteries, nunneries and other buildings there were hundreds of fanatical followers of his cult. He possessed a large force of soldiers pledged to the service of Kinich Ahau, the Sun God, and, if he decided to carry matters with a high hand, he could no doubt get control of the city, make away with me and my friends and defy the people. But I knew he was superstitious, that in his own way and at heart he was deeply, fanatically religious, that he now accepted me as a lineal descendant of Kukulcan and therefore semi-divine and probably immortal, and I could not see that he could possibly gain anything by not minding his own business.

All these thoughts rushed through my mind in a far shorter time than it takes to tell. I plied Nohul Voh with questions, begged him to reveal anything he knew regarding the priest's plots, asked him what he suspected.

"I know nothing, my son," he declared, "but I suspect

much. Does the farmer trust the fox among his fowls? Does the hawk nest with the doves? Does the snake move in a straight line? Do melons grow on corn stalks? No, Itzimin! As the gods made them, so will they be, and they have made Kinchi Haman as deformed in brain as in body. Always has he been plotting and planning ill to someone. Always he gloats on suffering and on blood. He never forgives and never forgets. When I see the river run uphill, when I see fish fly in the air, then and not until then will I believe Kinchi Haman no longer plots and schemes harm to someone. But what it is or when or how, I cannot say. But remember, my son, the deer sleeps with his nose to the wind; the gopher rests at the mouth of his hole."

So the old fellow was merely suspicious after all—suspicious only because he mistrusted the priest. He had nothing to base his suspicions on. Like all old people he was something of a scare-head, I began to think. And of what use was it to be able to look into the past and the future, to have the reputation of being a sorcerer, of being possessed with the wisdom of the ages if, when one most wanted it, nothing definite could be learned?

NOHUL VOH seemed to read my thoughts. He was gazing fixedly, steadily at me. "My son," he said, a serious note in his voice, "a crackling twig frightens the hare but the tiger pays no heed to a falling tree. My lord feels secure in his strength, but the tallest tree is struck first by the lightning. You say to yourself: 'Nohul Voh fears without reason.' You think in your mind: 'Kinchi Haman dares do no harm unto you.' Perhaps it is so—often what we most fear is our least danger—but there are many in Mictolan who still are true to the priest of Kinich Ahau; there are many whom he can rely upon, and while the scorpion still has his sting, one should beware of him. Greatly have you injured Kinchi Haman. You have humbled his pride, you have robbed him of the Virgin he had selected as a bride for Kinich Ahau. You have honored the Prince Azcopil; you have made the Temple of the Plumed Serpent greater than that of the Lord of Day.

"And there is another thing, O, Itzimin Chac, a matter of which I have not spoken. In the annals of the House of Tutul Zius is an ancient legend—perhaps a prophecy, which says that in the end, one of the Tutul Zius clan shall battle with one of the clan of the Ipa Hanacs, and there shall be bloodshed and death, and the Ipa Hanac shall be slain by the hand of the son of the Tutul Zius. And the legend tells, my lord, that the battle shall be because of a maiden and of a sacrifice, and that it shall take place on the day of Tonalmatl. Though you are not of the Tutul Zius clan, yet do you bear the symbol upon your breast. Kinchi Haman is of the clan of Ipa Hanac, and—the day of the Tonalmatl is but two days distant."

Something in his tones, in his words, frightened me. Why had he never told me this before? Was it an ancient legend or was it his way of warning me of some impending calamity? Whichever it was, it had aroused my lingering suspicions, my half-formed fears. I had seen too many of the legends and prophecies fulfilled to treat the tale as of no consequence. The instant he had mentioned a maiden, the sacrifice, the day of Tonalmatl, I had thought of danger threatening Itza, of the almost forgotten sacrifices held by the old priest. Was it not possible—even probable—that he was planning to injure my beloved one in revenge for having cheated his beastly god of her sacrifice? It would be a revenge, a diabolical way of getting back at me, well worthy of his warped, vindictive, inhuman brain.

What if the legend or prophecy or whatever it was said the priest would die? It did not say that that would save the woman. Of what use to kill the priest if Itza were injured or destroyed? The very thought of harm coming to her drove me frantic. Unconsciously, unreasonably perhaps, I had assumed that the tale referred to me. Nohul Voh had hinted it broadly enough. Not for a moment did it occur to me that the legend, if legend it were, might refer to some other member of the Tutul Zius clan, to some other Ipa Hanac, to some woman other than Itza. But forewarned is forearmed. I would rush to Itza, I would guard her, watch her, remain by her side every moment until after the Tonalmatl had passed. I sprang to my feet, rushed towards the door. Before I had taken two strides, racing footsteps sounded in the outer passage, and wild-eyed, panting, ghastly pale, Azcopil dashed into the room.

"Itza!" he gasped. "Itza! She has gone—vanished!"

I staggered back, faint, weak, too horrified, too overwhelmed to speak. Nohul Voh's warning had come too late. The blow had fallen!

CHAPTER XVI

The Monster of Sacrifices

AS if in a trance, I heard him stammer out the terrible news. She had been alone in the palace with the princesses, Tutuil and Mitchi Ina. She had left them to go into the patio to gather flowers. A moment later they had heard a piercing scream, and, rushing to the patio followed by the attendants, they had found it empty. Terrified, they had searched the palace from end to end, but no trace of my beloved one could be found. The guards, ever posted at the doorways, had not seen her pass. Several servants had seen her enter the patio, but no one had seen her leave it. She had vanished, disappeared as completely, as mysteriously, as though she had dissolved in air. A terrified servant had found the prince, he had rushed to the palace, had learned of the terrible catastrophe, and had dashed to Nohul Voh's to tell me.

The sorcerer's voice brought me to my senses. "My son," he said, placing his hand upon my shoulder, "the serpent has struck, but his head shall be crushed beneath your heel. Upon your breast is the symbol of the Tutul Zius; bear your blow like a son of that clan, for it is written in the book of fate that you shall triumph in the end. And let not your brain be clouded nor your actions stayed by fear for the maiden Itza. No harm will befall her before the day of Tonalmatl. Seek her O, Itzimin Chac, even though the way leads unto the inner precincts of the Temple of the Sun, for in the City of Mictolan, even the portals of Kinich Ahau cannot bar the way to the betrayed bearer of the Book of Kukulcan. But beware, my son, that you crush not the serpent ere you have bared the secrets of his den. And seek not rashly and alone, for the venom of the serpent is deadly and he strikes most surely in the dark. Now go you with the favor of the gods and the prayers of Nohul Voh, for the clan of Ipa Hanac draws near to its end."

The words of the old sorcerer reassured me. He declared Itza was in no danger until the day of Tonalmatl. In that case I had thirty-six hours in which to find and rescue her, time enough to search every nook and corner in the whole of Mictolan, even the inner temple, Nohul Voh suggested. Telling Azcopil to join me with his own retainers, and to spread the news of Itza's disappearance and to promise immense rewards for news of her, I dashed to the palace. Everyone was excited, confused, terrified, and they chattered, moaned, lamented, besought mercy and pleaded for forgiveness at the same time. Impatient, maddened at the loss of time, I managed to quiet them at last, to make them understand there was no blame attached to anyone, and to get some

Far above our heads, two hundred feet and more above where we stood, showed a square of blue sky half hidden by wavering, swaying, lambent flames

order out of chaos and some sort of a connected and intelligible account of what had happened. But there were no details, nothing added to what the prince had told me. Itza had vanished. She certainly had not left the palace by either of the two doors. But how, by what mysterious means could she have disappeared from the open flower-filled patio within a few yards of scores of attendants? Unless there was a secret exit, a hidden doorway, it seemed supernatural. And I could find no trace of such an opening. The flowers, shrubs and trees were undisturbed. The smooth paths revealed no sign of a trapdoor, and the ornate sculptured fountain in the centre splashed and tinkled as usual. But the question of how Itza had gone was of far less importance than where she was. Regardless of the manner in which she had vanished, or by whose hands, she must be somewhere within the city, and I would find her, rescue her, if I had to raze every building to do so.

Summoning my bodyguard of picked warriors, who heretofore had been wholly ornamental, I joined Azcopil, who arrived with a crowd of his friends and retainers. Already the news of my loss had spread like wildfire through the city. Crowds thronged and milled about some shouting vengeance on those who were responsible; others awed, terrified, declaring Itza had been carried off by some spirit or devil; others declaring the Sun God had taken her for his bride; others consoling me, still others volunteering their services. Somehow the rumor had spread that Kinchi Haman was at the bottom of the trouble, and among the curses, prayers, shouts and disputes, I heard many of the throng crying for the blood of the priest, demanding that he be seized and tortured. Quarrels arose, the people split into factions—one for Kinchi Haman, the other for me—and in a moment the streets became a riot, a pandemonium. But we paid no heed to the excited, struggling, arguing mob. Let them settle it as they might, let them break one anothers' heads, if they wanted to. Itza must be found, and at the head of our men, Azcopil and I hurried towards the Temple of Kinich Ahau. Into the great court we poured, thrusting aside the temple guards, disarming them, binding them.

Ordering a party of our men to search every outbuilding, to prevent anyone from entering or leaving the place, we dashed up the short flight of steps to the great sculptured doorway. A stalwart guard barred our way only to fall, gasping, from a savage blow of Azcopil's war club. A freightened dishevelled priest sprang forward and with upraised arms forbade us to enter. "Back!" he shouted, "Back, defilers of the Temple of the Lord of Day! What seek you here with noise and violence?"

I laughed hoarsely, wildly. "I seek the misshapen, evil thing you call your priest!" I cried. "The Kinchi Haman, Poisoner of the Year. Aside, man, or your spirit joins that of your guard yonder! This day Kinich Ahau bows to the will of Kukulcan."

"Kinchi Haman is not within," stammered the terrified priest. "Not since the ceremony of the Rising Sun has he been within the temple. Turn back, O, Itzimin Chac, and bring not the vengeance of the All Powerful upon you and yours!"

"That for your god and his vengeance!" I cried, snapping my fingers in his face. "You lie! Kinchi Haman *is* within."

With a quick motion I seized him by the long hair, swung him to one side, and followed by the prince and a scant half dozen of my men, burst into the temple. Cries, shouts, curses came from the throng of priests, servants, acolytes and attendants as, glancing to right and left, into passages and rooms, we hurried on. Which way should we turn? Where should we seek? The place was a labyrinth of passages, of narrow halls, of cell-like

rooms, a veritable warren, a miniature city within the vast pyramidal Kus. A cry from Azcopil caused me to wheel. We were alone. Our men, filled with superstitious fears at entering the sacred temple, had deserted us.

But neither the prince nor I thought for an instant of turning back. Somewhere within the temple was the high priest; never once did we doubt that he knew of Itza's whereabouts, and our only thoughts were to find him, threaten him, wring the truth from his grinning, hideous mouth. On every side were enemies, fanatical, outraged priests and temple servitors, buzzing like angry bees but, unarmed as they were, fearing to throw themselves upon us, contenting themselves with threats of their gods' vengeance, by calling down curses and maledictions upon us. We paid little heed to them. I felt sure that we would not find either Itza or the high priest in this part of the vast structure. He would be hiding—like the cowardly, lurking reptile he was, in some secret, innermost lair. But where? We were wasting time seeking blindly for a way to reach him. We might wander for hours aimlessly and be no nearer to our quarry. Roughly I seized a scowling, threatening priest and shook him until his teeth chattered. Then, holding my dreaded pistol at his head, I ordered him to lead us to the quarters of the high-priest. Hardly able to speak for terror, with shaking knees, he babbled that he could not, that the punishment of the gods would fall upon him if he did so.

"The curses of Kukulcan will fall upon you and all within the temple, if you do not!" I hissed at him. "And the thunder of Itzimin Chac will kill you where you stand!"

PITIFULLY he begged for mercy, implored me to spare him. But before I could reply, before I could repeat a threat, Azcopil's spear flashed by my eyes and buried itself in the fellow's throat. Leaping forward, the prince seized a fat elderly priest, whose robes showed him to be of an exalted order.

Prodding him with his sword, threatening him with the most horrible tortures, Azcopil urged him forward. But little urging was required. The sight of my weapon, and of the dead priest upon the stone flagging, had been too much for the old fellow. The vengeance of the gods might eventually fall upon us, but it would be of little satisfaction to him if he was stark and stiff when the gods saw fit to act. And the gods seemed very slow. Babbling incoherently, vowing Kinchi Haman was not in the temple, he led the way at the point of the prince's spear. Up a flight of steps, through a narrow passage, between rows of giant, magnificently-sculptured idols he stumbled, with us at his heels. Even in my distress, obsessed with one idea of rescuing my beloved Itza, I noticed half-consciously that the temple was immeasurably ancient, that it was unlike anything hitherto known in America, and that the outer Mayan portion must have been erected over the original prehistoric structure.

Dimly, as though it were a fragment of some dream, I remembered Nohul Voh's words; "When our fathers' fathers' fathers' came to Mictolan a temple stood here—and the monster dwelt within." The old sorcerer had told the truth about the ancient temple. Was there really a monster here? Would I find the thing? Then a terrible, a sickening thought flashed through my mind. They spoke of it as the "Monster of Sacrifices"; Itza had said the high priest fed the fiendish thing with maidens. What if Kinchi Haman had seized her—my Itza, to fill the maw of some horrible, loathsome creature! But Nohul Voh had assured me she would be safe until the day of Tonalmatl. Could I trust in him? How did he know?

Then suddenly, like a ray of light, it came to me. The day of Tonalmatl, the day of the spring florescence, the day of the sacrifice of girls married symbolically by death to the Sun God! Itza herself had been a chosen one! I saw it all now. The villainous, bloodthirsty priest had abducted her, stolen her to sacrifice her to his pagan god by hurling her into the sacred well! In that way he could avenge himself upon me and would appease his god at the same time. Nohul Voh must have suspected, must have guessed. That was why he had felt sure Itza would be unharmed until the day of Tonalmatl! My face blanched at the thought of Itza meeting such a fate. I groaned aloud. But there was some consolation in the thought. The fanatical priest would not harm a hair of her head, would not dare anger his god by defiling her with his touch, until the appointed time. And I still had nearly thirty-six hours.

AS these thoughts raced through my mind, we were still hurrying onward. How many steps we ascended, how many we descended, how many doors we entered, I shall never know. But at last, falling upon his knees, grovelling at our feet, he pointed to a closed door ahead, and in a paroxysm of terror whispered that the quarters of Kinchi Haman were beyond the portal.

Brushing him aside, we sprang forward. We hurled ourselves upon the door. It swung wide, and with ready weapons, we dashed into the room. It was empty! We stared about. Everywhere were signs of recent occupancy. There were discarded garments we recognized as belonging to the priest. In one corner was his couch, tumbled and tossed as when last used. Furnishings, clothing, papyrus books were scattered about. Everything told of a hurried exit. The priest had fled at our approach. But where, by what means? Not another door, not a window was visible!

I could see by the prince's expression that he was nervous, that he was filled with superstitious fears. Itza had vanished mysteriously, almost supernaturally. And here, in this room within the very heart of the temple, the high priest had also vanished. It would never do to let Azcopil become terrified. I counted upon him, must have him to fall back upon.

I laughed, made the place ring with my merriment. "The snake has gone!" I cried, "The door was open! Fools we have been! But we will find him yet."

The expression of nameless fear left Azcopil's face. His superstitions were stilled. But I felt somehow that Kinchi Haman had not fled by way of the door by which we had entered. Somewhere within the room there must be a secret door, a hidden opening. Madly I pulled the rugs, the hangings, the furnishings about. Suddenly I stopped, motionless, listening. From somewhere, seemingly beneath my feet, came a strange, rumbling growling roar. The prince heard it also. Terror filled his eyes, his mouth gaped. I felt my own scalp tingle, cold chills ran up and down my spine. Was it—? Yes, it could be nothing else; it must be the Monster of Sacrifices!

Somewhere close at hand, the Thing—whatever it was—was roaring, howling like a lost soul. What was it, where was it? I glanced fearfully about, half expecting to see some fantastic, horrible, ghastly, nightmarish creature spring from some secret hidden door. Then common sense came to my rescue. Whatever it was, wherever it might be, it was not probable that it was within reach of the priest's sanctum. He was no man to take chances. No doubt it was securely caged. If it devoured human beings, it was not the sort of beast to be kept as a pet. Reassuring the prince, calming his fears by such arguments, we again fell to searching the chamber while, in the back of my mind, was a determination to destroy the ghastly monster as soon as I

had finished with Kinchi Haman. In fact I had a half-formed idea of throwing the priest to the monster and, so maddened was I at the priest's escape and at the loss of Itza, that, had I been able to lay hands upon him, I would have gloated upon seeing him torn to shreds and devoured by the Thing.

A shout from Azcopil brought me to his side at a bound. He had pushed aside a huge golden idol, and as he had done so, a dark opening in the wall was revealed. Without hesitation we entered. From somewhere far overhead a glimmer of light entered. By the faint illumination we saw a flight of steep, narrow stairs leading downwards in a spiral.

Down, down, down we went. I felt as if we were descending to the very bowels of the earth. And each moment, as we descended, the horrible banshee-like wailing, the howling of the Monster, increased. The earth seemed actually to tremble at its roar. What terrible, unimaginable thing *could* it be? I could think of nothing but some stupendous, gigantic, prehistoric creature. And was Itza here, near this Thing, crazed with terror of its infernal din? I ground my teeth in inexpressible rage at Kinchi Haman at the thought. I imagined him gloating over her screams and shrieks, driving her mad by pretending to feed her to the ravenous beast. Let me at him! Let me get my grip upon his twisted body and I would show *him* what terror was!

And then suddenly we came into bright light and halted in our tracks, staring dumbfounded at what we saw. We were in a vast circular chamber of polished black rock. From far above light streamed down. Before us in the centre of the floor was a round hole or shaft, its rim raised a few feet and glistening with red, yellow and green crystals.

Up from the centre of this crater-like hole rose a column of thin yellowish vapor, while from the unseen depths came that awful, roaring, demoniacal howl! I glanced up. I gaped—stared in wonder. Far above our heads—two hundred feet and more above where we stood, showed a square of blue sky half hidden by wavering, swaying lambent flames! Sudden knowledge, sudden understanding came to me. From the bowels of the earth beneath the temple this geyser of inflammable gas rose to the temple top, and, ignited by the sacred fires ceaselessly burning there, spread its flaming banners against the sky. If Nohul Voh was right, then the Bridge of Light now spanned the chasm.

But of what use to me? Itza, my Itza was gone! By the irony of fate the way to escape had come when I could not use it.

Filled with bitterness, torn with my heart-breaking misery, I half-consciously stepped forward and, leaning over, glanced into the pit. A horrified cry escaped from my lips. Below me, perhaps twenty feet from where I stood, a broad shelf encircled the shaft. And upon it, twisted, contorted, ghastly, were dozens of human skeletons and human bodies! And still farther down, belching, roaring, howling from a great arched opening in one side of the pit and disappearing in a similar opening on the other side, was a column of luminous liquid or vapor like the jet of water from a stupendous, titanic flame. Fascinated, I gazed. With dread of what I *might* see, I peered at those grisly ghastly bodies, until convinced that all had been there for days—weeks. Then, and not till then did full comprehension come to me. *This* was the Monster of Sacrifices! This shrieking, howling torrent of gas or vapor or whatever it was, was the *Thing* I had pictured as some loathsome, horrible beast! Those mouldering bodies and whitening bones were the victims of sacrifices to the phenomenon! I laughed madly, hysterically as the tension on my nerves was released. To the prince, who feared I had gone mad, I explained. Incredulously he listened to my words and then, as he, too, understood, his maniacal laughter mingled with my own.

SUDDENLY I sprang to my feet with a triumphant shout. Now everything was clear. The Bridge of Light! The roaring horizonal column of vapor below us! They were one and the same! Through some subterranean passageway, the hissing, bellowing gas traveled to the chasm, the rocks there were filled with the radium ore; the gas was ionized, and as it spouted across the abyss, the molecules, the atoms that had been liquid became electrified ions, cations, solids—countless billions of infinitesimal bits of metal or mineral, moving, to be sure, streaming across the chasm, but under such pressure, so closely packed, that they formed a span as strong and unyielding as solid metal! It seemed incredible, but it was fact, I felt sure. Even a column of water, under pressure, will support a great weight, seems to become almost solid, and this great stream of electrified ions was ten thousand, a million times more solid than water.

And how natural, how easily explained everything was after all. No wonder the flames flared from the temple top when the Bridge of Light appeared. These two were one and the same thing in different forms. When the vast stream of gas rushed across the pit before us, its escaping vapors rose up and flamed at the temple-summit. Kinchi Haman had nothing to do with it. There was nothing mysterious, nothing secret about it. It was merely a natural force, a phenomenon of nature.

At any other time I would have been elated, overjoyed at my discovery, at my solution of the seeming mysteries. At any other time I would have rushed to the chasm, and with Itza by my side, would have sped across the Bridge of Light and would have left Mictolan forever.

But now, now what did it matter? Nothing mattered as long as I had lost Itza. I must find her, *would* find her! But one great worry, one immense load was off my mind. I felt sure she had not been sacrificed to Kinchi Haman's Monster of the temple.

Equally, I felt sure, she had not passed this way. She must have been secreted in some other portion of the temple. We must hurry back, must retrace our steps to the priest's quarters, must search elsewhere. Already we had lost valuable hours. Sunset and darkness were approaching; we must hurry. Back up the winding, interminable stairs we ran, panting, muscles tired and aching. We neared the top; ahead we could see the opening to Kinchi Haman's room, when, in the deep shadows, my eye caught the glint of light flashing from some object beside the stairway. My groping hands found it. A glad shout came from my lips, as peering close I examined it. It was a link of gold chain! I would have known it anywhere. There could be no mistake. It was a fragment of a chain I had given Itza! And it was caught, jammed in a crevice, in the crack of a cleverly hidden door!

Feverishly we searched for a fastening, a handle, for the door was of stone and fitted perfectly into the surrounding masonry.

We were on the right track. Itza had been brought this way. Her chain, dislodged by her struggles or trailing had been caught in the door as it was closed, and somewhere behind that secret doorway, we would find her.

Suddenly the prince uttered an exclamation. "Wait;" he cried, as he dashed up the few remaining steps. The next instant he was at the doorway to the priest's room. I saw him reach within, saw him draw the

golden idol towards him, and as he did so the solid masonry swung back before me!

Cautiously, feeling our way, with weapons in readiness for instant use, we crept along the dark and narrow passageway. For what seemed miles, we followed it. No doors opened from it; it was a damp, low-roofed noisome tunnel, and I shuddered as I thought of Itza in such a place. Then to our ears came the sound of falling water. The floor was wet and slippery. Narrow, uncertain streaks of light showed in the masonry, and we came to a halt at the end of the passageway. Above us water gurgled and splashed. We examined the walls, searched for some door, some hidden exit. My head bumped against some object. I stepped back with a cry of pain and glanced up. A bar of metal projected from the wall. Reaching up I grasped it, tugged at it. Slowly, smoothly it moved. A blaze of light fell upon us. A wide opening showed above our heads. I grasped the edge, swung myself up, and cried out in utter amazement. I was standing in the patio of my own palace!

CHAPTER XVII

The Secret Door

THE mystery of Itza's disappearance was solved. A segment of the circular flagging about the fountain was movable; it could be opened by means of the lever within the tunnel, and Itza had been seized, dragged into the secret passage and carried to the temple. But knowing how she had been abducted did not help matters any. We were no nearer finding her now than we were before. We had lost valuable, precious time, wandering underground merely to find ourselves back in my own patio. We had followed the back trail from the temple, and I raved, swore, cursed in my extremity and my impotent rage. There was nothing to do but return to the deserted quarters of the priest and from there make a thorough, systematic search of every room, passage and chamber within the huge temple. But for us to undertake this alone seemed hopeless, almost suicidal. Torn with sorrow, maddened as I was, I had sense enough left to realize this. To blindly sacrifice myself and Azcopil would not help Itza, and I had no doubt that, when we returned to the temple, we would meet with a warm reception, that the priests and their attendants would be armed, and that we would stand little chance against their numbers. Moreover, how could we two hope to find Itza in the mazes of the temple? No doubt it was full of secret passages and hidden doors. We knew one such existed and where there was one there would be more. We might pass within a few yards, a few feet, of Itza without knowing it, and she might be carried from her hiding place to some room we had already searched. No, to have any chance of success, a large body of men would be needed, and we had already found that even the loyal retainers of the prince, and my own guards, would die rather than force their way into the Temple of the Sun.

Yet we must have men. I was determined to find Kinchi Haman and to search every nook and cranny of the temple, even if I was forced to tear the place to bits. Neither would this have been such an impossible feat as might be imagined. By closing the outlet at the top of the temple, thus confining the gas from that awful pit, and then igniting it, the structure could be blown to bits. And I mentally vowed that if I discovered Itza no longer lived, I would wreak that vengeance upon the place and its inmates. That such wild thoughts should have entered my head, that for one moment I should have contemplated the wholesale destruction of men and women who were in no way responsible for my bereavement, proves the mental state I was in, proves that I was temporarily insane with grief and desperation. Indeed, at that time, I would have stopped at nothing, would have destroyed the entire city, if doing so would have brought Itza back to me.

The prince recalled me to my sober senses. The sun was setting, we were wasting valuable time. Only thirty hours now remained before the dawning of the day of Tonalmatl. The ruddy glare of the sinking sun brought a new thought to me. Would Kinchi Haman appear before the altar of his temple to conduct the ceremony of the Setting Sun? Would his religious fanaticism overcome his fear of my vengeance? Would he appear and openly defy me?

My thoughts were interrupted by Azcopil. "Itzimin," he said earnestly. "You must carry out the ritual of Kukulcan. If you fail, if the people find you have neglected this, they will turn against you, will lose faith in you and will swing to Kinchi Haman. It is hard, I know. I, your friend and brother, know how you are suffering, how you are tortured, Itzimin. But I know my people better than you do. To find Itza we must have men, must have support and the faith and confidence of my people. If they see you not upon the altar of the Plumed Serpent they will say the God of Day has cast you down for violating the sanctity of his temple; but if you appear, they will think your god is greater and more powerful than that of Kinchi Haman. And, Itzimin, from the temple you may call down the wrath of Kukulcan upon Kinchi Haman and all those who have a part in that tragedy that has befallen. Aye, Itzimin, my brother, and you may promise great things and the favor of the Plumed Serpent to those who are loyal and aid us. Do you not see, Itzimin?"

I saw. At first, as he spoke, I had been filled with rage that he, my best and closest friend, should have suggested such a thing. But as he continued I realized the truth of what he said, the importance of sacrificing my feelings in order to impress the people, the loss to my cause if I failed to carry out my rôle as priest of the Plumed Serpent, as the son of Kukulcan.

And so, despite my tortured mind and breaking heart, despite my grief, my rage, my impatience, my mad desire to be searching for my beloved one, I summoned my guard, entered my litter, and accompanied by the prince started towards the temple as usual. At my appearance, the crowds that thronged the streets gazed in amazement. What magic was this? They knew we had forced our way into the temple—our men had reported our rash and sacrilegious act—we had never come forth, and yet, here we were emerging from my palace, carried in my golden litter towards my own temple, unharmed, apparently as calm, as untroubled as ever. No wonder they stared at me incredulously. And then, from hundreds of throats, wild cheers, cries of delight, triumphant shouts arose. "The son of Kukulcan!" they screamed. "The Serpent God is the Great God!" "Itzimin Chac walks with the gods!" "The bearer of the token lives forever!" "Those who walk with Itzimin Chac have the favor of Kukulcan!" "The Prince Azcopil walks with the son of Kukulcan!" "The power of Kinchi Haman wanes!" "Where is the hunchback priest?" "Death to him who would injure the Great One!"

Yes, Azcopil had been right. My appearance had been a master stroke. Kinchi Haman was losing ground. From the temple I would exhort, threaten, promise the people. I would work upon their excitable, superstitious natures, and would rouse them to the point where they would follow me to the innermost sanctums of the Temple of the Sun. Yet there were many who still

favored Kinchi Haman. I could hear their shouts, their cries above the din. But they seemed to be greatly in the minority, and I noticed that those who were still loyal to the priest were of the poorest, most ignorant class, the rag-tag and bobtail, the gutter-sweepings and ragamuffins of the city.

I REACHED the temple and mounted to the terrace, while high above the summit of the neighboring temple the multicolored flames waved like banners.

A terrible thought crossed my mind. Perhaps Kinchi Haman had left the valley, perhaps he had fled with Itza across the Bridge of Light! With a tremendous effort I put the thought from me. No, he was still here. Something told me, some premonition convinced me that both he and Itza were near at hand. But would he appear upon his temple? Dared he defy me? Half hoping that he would, for I would then know he was still within reach and that Itza was near, yet hoping he would not, I peered across at the other temple. But no sign of life appeared upon it, no procession wound its way around the great terrace at the summit of the *Kus*. How I went through the ritual I do not know. What I said I cannot remember. To me it was a terrible nightmare, separate from my conscious, tortured mind.

But my words, my scathing denunciation of the deformed priest and his deeds, my vows of vengeance, my pleas for support, and my exaltations of my own God (whom the people of course assumed was Kukulcan), my promises of rewards for those who were loyal and who obeyed me, must have had the desired effect, for a thunder of cheers rose on the still evening air. And the fact that Kinchi Haman had not appeared, that for once the ceremony of the Setting Sun was not celebrated upon the temple of Kinich Ahau, had an even greater effect upon the populace. The omission was, to their minds, conclusive evidence of the superiority, the triumph of the Plumed Serpent. Rumors that the priest had been destroyed by mysterious means, rumors that Kinich Ahau himself frowned upon his rascally priest, spread through the crowd.

And then, at the very moment when I felt we had triumphed, wild cries, excited shouts arose from the crowd, and all eyes were turned towards the Temple of the Sun. Standing before the great altar, clearly outlined in the glare of the flames above, looking like a fiend from the pit—was Kinchi Haman, his arms upraised, a triumphant grin on his hideous face. Beside myself with rage at sight of him, without stopping to think of consequences, heedless of the fact that he was separated from me by more than three hundred yards, I drew my pistol from beneath my robes and fired.

At the flash and the roar of the explosion, shrieks, wails, terrified cries arose from the multitude, and with one accord the people flung themselves prostrate upon the ground. But I scarcely realized this. My eyes had been fixed upon the distant priest, and at the report of my weapon I had seen him reel to one side and disappear. Had I killed him? Had my bullet by mere chance found its mark? Full realization of what that meant swept over me. If I had killed him I had perhaps destroyed the one man who knew where Itza was confined.

But there was one satisfaction. Kinchi Haman had not fled from Mictolan, Itza must still be in the valley. And if I had killed the priest, there was more opportune time to search the temple than the present. If he were dead, the place would be in an uproar, the attendants terrified would be disorganized. Itza would be forgotten, unguarded. Tearing off my ceremonial dress, I dashed down to the entrance where Azcopil was awaiting me. The plaza was almost deserted. Only my personal guards and those of the prince remained. The crowds, awed, terrified at the flash and report of my weapon, horrified and frightened at seeing Kinchi Haman fall, fully believing that it was the vengeance of Kukulcan, had fled to their homes seeking hiding places from the vengeance of the outraged god. Even our soldiers were quaking with fear. It was bad enough to have two priests at daggers' points, to have the people split into factions and ready to break into open hostilities. But to have their two most powerful deities, their two great gods at war, was too awful. No one dared even guess where it might end, what calamity might result.

But my rash act in shooting at Kinchi Haman had had one good result. The soldiers were convinced that Kukulcan was the all-powerful god. They had seen my thunder and lightning strike down the priest of Kinich Ahau upon the very altar of the God of Day. His god had not protected him, had not wrought vengeance upon me. Hence, to their minds, Kinich Ahau bowed to Kukulcan, and they were prepared to follow me wherever I took them. And without loss of time I led them straight to the other temple. To my amazement, no one disputed our way. The door was unguarded, the passages were deserted.

I dashed up the pyramidal *Kus*, mounted to the altar. But there was no trace of the body of the priest. I searched for tell-tale drops of blood, but could find none. I did, however, find the spatter of lead from my bullet upon the sculptured stonework directly back of where Kinchi Haman had stood. Azcopil glanced furtively, half-frightened about. His superstitions were aroused again. It savored of mystery, of magic. Even to me it seemed inexplicable. But there was no time to bother about matters of such minor importance. We must search the interior of the temple.

Systematically, we went through the rooms, the passageway, the maze of chambers, vaults and cells. But there was no trace of Itza, no trace of the priest, not a living soul anywhere! What had happened? What had become of the scores of priests, guards and attendants? Where had they gone? It was uncanny, mysterious, inexplicable. Utterly discouraged, weary, with eyes aching and reddened from want of sleep, we stumbled from the empty temple to find the sun rising above the mountains to the east. Utterly hopeless and despondent, with stumbling feet and bowed heads, we made our way to the palace to find Nohul Voh awaiting us.

"Itzimin, my son," he exclaimed, placing his arm about me, "long have I awaited your coming. By the sadness of your face, I know you have no news of her whom you seek. But fear not, she is still unharmed. I have much to reveal to you, but first must you rest and eat, for you will need your strength. Much must be done today, for with the setting of the sun tonight the Tonalmatl begins."

I STARTED. Only a scant twelve hours remained! I had counted upon having all that day and the night as well, to continue my seemingly hopeless search.

Nohul Voh must have read my thoughts. He smiled reassuringly. "Fear not and have faith in the prophecy and in Fate," he said. "Though the Tonalmatl begins tonight by the stars, yet not until Itzamna, the Moon God, greets his Lord, Kinich Ahau, with the dawning of the day does the feast of the Tonalmatl take place. And now, ask no questions my son but eat, and you, O, Prince, eat and rest for much strength will you, too, require for what lies before you."

Not until we had eaten—though it was with difficulty I forced the food down my throat despite my famished state—would the old sorcerer speak again. Then, as we rested our weary bodies among the cushions, he

drew near. "Tell me," he asked, "all that has transpired, my son."

Briefly I related what we had done.

He nodded. "Kinchi Haman still lives," he declared, when I had ended. "He hides from your wrath. With him are those of the temple, for he hopes, by giving maidens to Kinich Ahau as brides upon the day of Tonalmatl, to win the favor of the god and so triumph over you, my son, and those who are your friends, and to make his god supreme in this valley of Mictolan. Until that time he and his fellows fear to show themselves, for they dread the power of the thunder that kills in the hands of Itzimin Chac. Already—"

"I've searched the temple and he's not there," I exclaimed impatiently, interrupting him.

He smiled enigmatically. "Aye, you have searched a *part* of the temple," he replied. "It was of this I have waited long to speak, my son. Did you not search the chamber of Kinchi Haman? Did you not find it empty? But did that prove the priest was not within the temple? Did you not by merest chance find the doorway wherein was caught the bit of the maiden's chain? Have I not searched the skies for many years—for centuries—and do I not each night find new stars? Does not the rabbit have always two doors to his hole? Has my son measured the length of the *Kus* on the *outside*? Has he paced the length within? Has—"

I started up. His words electrified me. Fool that I had been not to have thought of this! The base of the pyramid was stupendous—it covered acres of ground. How could I be sure there were not two, three—a dozen portions separated by secret doors, or perhaps reached by tunnels like the one that led to my own patio?

"Has my son yet seen the home of the Virgins of the Sun?" continued Nohul Voh, "Has he seen the sacred well? Has he yet found the inner chamber wherein the sacred golden image of Kinich Ahau is worshipped by the Kinchi Haman and his priests? Yet, my lord, all these are within the temple. And—"

Again I interrupted him. I leaped to my feet. Dolt, fool that I had been! I had wasted time wandering about the outer, the most unimportant portion of the temple's passages and rooms. Why had Azcopil not reminded me of these other places? I started for the door, but the sorcerer checked me.

"Wait!" he exclaimed. "To beat with bare hands upon stone walls will but bruise your hands," he continued. "Does the jaguar try to outrun the deer? Does the wild hog try to push down the tree for the fruit he craves?

"Very crafty is Kinchi Haman. Only he knows the secret of the moving stones that seal the doorway to the inner temple. For days, months, years you might search for it in vain, so cleverly is it hidden. But there is a way, a way known to Nohul Voh, and here, my son, is the key to that way."

From somewhere in his garments he produced a tube of bamboo with carved stoppers at the ends. Carefully removing one of these, he disclosed what appeared to be a stick of some reddish clay curiously mottled with yellowish flakes. Indeed, it resembled a stick of the ornamental red sealing wax filled with flakes of mica more than anything else.

I reached out my hand to examine it, but Nohul Voh checked me in time. "Touch it not!" he warned me. "Within this case it can harm you not, but touch it and your flesh will be seared to the bone. But it is the magic that will reveal the secret door of the inner temple."

I was puzzled. What did he mean? How could this thing—whatever it was—that he handled so gingerly, reveal the hidden door?

But the old sorcerer was explaining. "Together with the prince and your men, enter once more the temple. First measure the length and the breadth of the outer side, and then pace the width and length within. By this shall you know, my son, where is the wall that holds the secret door and, knowing this, unstop the end of this tube and hold it above the seams and marks upon the stone. Thus will it reveal to you where is the door and which the solid rock. Having found that which you seek, the rest is in your hands, O, Itzimin Chac. And now lose no more time, for the hours pass and never do they come again."

Handing me the alleged miraculous object, he rose to go. But as he neared the door, he turned back. "Preserve well that which I have given unto you," he admonished me. "In time of need it may serve as well for a weapon as for finding the hidden doorway. And—mayhap, if you flee across the Bridge of Light with the rescued maiden, it may serve you well within that Cavern of the Bats."

FOR a space I remained motionless, pondering on the strange words of the sorcerer, staring at the harmless-looking bamboo in my hand. Had I not known Nohul Voh so well, I should have thought him mad. How could this thing reveal a door in the rock wall of the temple? How could it "serve as a weapon," unless I threw it at someone or used it as a club? Of what use could it be if—and the *if* loomed very large indeed—I ever reached the Cave of the Bats with Itza?

"Let us go!" exclaimed the prince. "Great is the wisdom of Nohul Voh. With his help shall we find Itza."

There was no harm in trying. I had intended to take the sorcerer's hint and measure the temple and find where the secret chambers were situated, and calling our men together we hurried to the base of the great Kus.

Carefully we paced the base on two sides. Then, entering the deserted passages, we repeated the operation within. To accomplish this was no easy matter, and I fumed and fretted at the time consumed in doing it. In no spot could we pace the whole length or width—walls, corners, columns and partitions intervened—but by measuring one room or passage, allowing for the thickness of the wall, and measuring the next and so on, we satisfied ourselves that the width of the place was so nearly that of the outer surface that no large secret chambers could be there. But the length fell far short of that on the outside. In fact, it was not half the extent, and somewhere beyond the sculptured wall that blocked us, we felt sure that Kinchi Haman, his followers and my Itza were concealed.

Wondering, uneasy, nervous, the men gathered about at our orders. Skeptically, with no confidence whatever, I unstopped the bamboo and pointed the open end at the massive masonry wall. I uttered an involuntary ejaculation of wonder. Azcopil started and leaped back. Before us a large circular area of the rock glowed with brilliant red light! It was as if I held a powerful electric flashlight with a red bulb in my hand, yet no light, no rays streamed from the uncanny thing. Deep sighs of wonder came from the awed soldiers as, still wondering, I moved it back and forth, up and down, searching the stonework for signs of a door. Every detail of the wall was clearly illuminated. Of course, that was what Nohul Voh had meant. The thing would give us light to find the door. He loved to surround everything with mystery. But there was nothing so very mysterious about the invention after all. It was probably some radium compound—he had warned me it would burn flesh—but if so, how could bamboo protect me? Perhaps it was some other substance, something unknown to the rest of the world. Well, in that case,

it was most interesting—would be a priceless thing if it could be commercialized. But, after all, as far as finding the door was concerned, it was no better than an ordinary torch. Such thoughts ran through my brain, as anxiously, impatiently I went slowly, carefully over the stonework with the prince beside me, for after the first surprise he had no further fear of the seemingly magic light.

Suddenly he sprang forward. Under the glare from the tube a beautiful bas-relief was clearly outlined, glowing as readily as though carved on the surface of a gigantic ruby. It was an enormous thing, sculptured on the faces of a dozen great stone blocks so well joined that the cement-filled seams were scarcely visible. All this I took in at a glance. Then I saw what had attracted the prince. As sharp and clear, as though painted in black pigment upon the stones, was the outline of a rectangle!

"Itzimin, look, the door!" ejaculated the prince.

I stared. Stepping close, I reached out my hand, feeling for the wide crevice that appeared to be there. But my fingers touched solid rock. There was no crack, no crevice! What did it mean? What miracle was this? That a door was there seemed indisputable. A door invisible without that glow, a door indetectable by touch, yet outlined in its entirety by the strange light emanating from the tube. Nohul Voh was right. The thing had revealed the hidden door. But how? Even in my impatience, my mad desire to force the portal, I found myself wondering, striving to solve the puzzle. Then, as I played the glow here and there, following the outlines of that hermetically sealed opening, I began to understand. Wherever there was solid rock, wherever there was cement or mortar the mysterious compound within the tube—some radium compound I now felt sure—caused the red glow. But where there was crack or crevice, an opening too minute even to see or feel, a black line was revealed. But my thoughts were cut short by a new discovery.

As the light or emanations of the tube flashed upon the floor close to the wall, a smaller, black rectangle showed. Just above it, upon the wall, the sculptured foot of the carved god was outlined in black, and the ornate sandal-fastening showed as a black mass. With a quick motion, Azcopil grasped the ring-shaped ornament. The god's foot swung inward. With a slight grating noise the rectangular stone in the floor moved upwards, and peering within the cavity revealed a metal lever. Stooping, I grasped it, pulled upon it. It moved smoothly, easily, and slowly the outlined section of the wall vanished before our eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

The End of Kinchi Haman

BEFORE us was a dark passageway. Flashing the strange red glow from my bamboo tube upon the stone walls and floor, with nerves tense, noiselessly, we moved forward, while at our heels crowded our men, filled with nameless dread, their sharp, indrawn, almost sobbing breaths, audible in the black silence of the tunnel. A dozen paces and the passage turned abruptly to the right and before us we saw a glimmer of light. Cautiously we stole forward. A heavy cloth drapery hung across the passage, and from beyond came the sounds of voices. With trembling fingers I carefully moved one edge of the curtain aside and looked into a large, brightly-lit room. Stalwart temple guards stood about; a dozen black-robed priests filled the chamber, and, seated in a throne-like stone chair, addressing them in earnest tones, was—Kinchi Haman!

At sight of the hideous priest responsible for all my sufferings and troubles, insane fury swept over me. All caution, all sense fled from my mind. With a savage jerk I tore the hanging aside and sprang into the room with the prince beside me. Instantly all was confusion. Had we materialized from thin air, the occupants of the room could not have been more amazed. Deathly fear distorted the face of the Kinchi Haman; the terrified priests screamed, crowded back, struggled and fought to retreat. Springing from his seat, Kinchi Haman sheltered himself behind the milling, close-packed men.

Furious, all my senses focussed on reaching him, I rushed on them. Two guards sprang forward with upraised weapons. One fell to a savage thrust from Azcopil, the other hurled himself at me. I swung my heavy-bladed sword, but before I could strike, an amazing thing happened. The golden cuirass of the guard seemed to burst into flame. With a shriek of agony, he staggered back. His weapon dropped from his hand, and with a crash, he sank lifeless to the floor! A nauseating odor of burning flesh filled the room. Where the golden breastplate had been, a horrible, scorched, blackened cavity showed on the dead man's breast. Shapeless blobs of molten gold smoked upon the flagging. Screams, shrieks, cries of horror and deadly fear came from the struggling, retreating priests. The guards dropped their weapons and fled. Here was magic—death instantaneous, terrible, invisible.

Solid metal burst into flame and ran like water at my approach! No wonder old Nohul Voh had said the bamboo tube with its contents would serve me well as a weapon! It was deadly, hellish. Its mysterious, invisible rays falling upon metal—at least upon gold—fused the metal instantly, burned the flesh beneath it to a crisp. I shuddered as I glanced at the terrible thing in my hand, at the seared, ghastly, contorted body of the dead guard at my feet. But my mind was centered upon Kinchi Haman. Nothing else seemed to matter.

Springing over the smoking body, hurling the struggling priests aside, striking to right and left, I forced myself through the huddled, fear-maddened throng. I was conscious that the prince was with me, from sounds in the rear I knew our men were close behind. A narrow door was packed, jammed with the priests in their stampede, and when at last—literally treading them underfoot—we gained the farther side of the room, Kinchi Haman had disappeared. There was only the one exit visible. Seizing the priests by hair, by garments, we dragged them aside, cleared a passage, and raced down the corridor beyond.

Ahead we heard the sounds of running feet. Into dark doorways and openings the fleeing priests and guards darted at our approach. But though we searched hastily in each, we found no trace of Kinchi Haman. On we rushed; somewhere beyond was the man we sought; misshapen, dwarfed, he could not run fast; we must soon overtake him. A startled yell came from the prince who now was leading. He checked himself and sprang back, collided with me, and together we rolled upon the floor and over us tripped our frightened but still faithful men. A metallic clang echoed through the passage and a massive metal gate dropped like a portcullis, barring the corridor before us.

For a moment we stared, dazed, balked. Then with a wild hope I seized the bamboo tube that had fallen from my hand, sprang forward, and pointed it at the metal bars. Instantly they glowed, and like bars of wax, they melted and vanished. Our way was clear; once again we dashed on. Before us rose a low flight of steps, and scrambling up these like a gigantic spider, we saw the high-priest. A moment more and he would gain the doorway at the summit of the steps and we would be too late. Drawing my pistol, I fired as I ran.

Like a clap of thunder the report roared in deafening echoes in the narrow passage; sulphurous smoke filled the air. The next second we reached the stairs, but Kinchi Haman had again eluded us. The door through which he had passed had been left ajar and it swung open at our touch. We found ourselves in a circular room like the bottom of a well, for it extended upwards to vast heights—perhaps to the very summit of the temple. The floor was flagged with huge stones so laid that their joints radiated from the centre of the room.

The beautifully frescoed stone walls were covered with intricate symbolic paintings of gods, priests, sacrifices and Mayan writing. In the centre of the place was a circular row of polished, tapering columns of vivid blue stone inlaid with gold, and rising for fully fifty feet to support an ornate roof or canopy of intricately-wrought silver. In the centre of the row of columns was a raised dais of blood-red stone, and seated upon this was the image of a hideous, misshapen, bestial god; a thing with human limbs and body, leering savage eyes; with huge gleaming fangs projecting from half-opened jaws from which a slavering tongue protruded. In place of ears were the conventionalized heads of rattlesnakes; the nose was an eagle's beak; in one claw-like hand he held a human heart, in the other a ghastly distorted human head. He was carved from a single immense block of black stone, and covering his chest was a great, gleaming, gem-studded disk of gold bearing a human face surrounded by rays—the symbol of the sun.

WE were gazing at the sacred image of Kinich Ahau! We were within that most holy, mysterious, forbidden shrine in the centre of the temple! The prince, awed, filled with superstitious fears, had prostrated himself. Our men were prone upon the floor, babbling prayers of repentance, half-crazed with terror of swift vengeance for having entered the most sacred spot. But I gave little heed to them. The high-priest had entered here. He was nowhere in sight. Yet there was no other opening, no place in which he could be concealed. I hunted everywhere. I tore aside tapestries, searched among the columns, about the dais. Cursing, fuming, seething with rage, I moved about the walls, turning the glow of the bamboo tube upon the stones. But nowhere was there a sign of a hidden door.

I turned to Azcopil, spoke to him sharply, roughly, scathingly. Trembling with fear, casting frightened glances at the monstrous god as if expecting it to come to life, he joined me. But in vain we shouted to the men. In the presence of the blood-thirsty black god they were nerveless, useless. Inch by inch I went over the stone floor, examining every block, every joint with the red rays. But in vain. Checkmated, utterly at a loss, beginning to feel, as did Azcopil and the men, that Kinchi Haman had vanished in this air by supernatural means, I stared about. I had searched everywhere, everywhere—but at the thought I sprang to the idol.

I had *not* searched the god! Over the dais I played the rays from Nohul Voh's gift. I turned it upon the god's feet, his legs, his back. With blanched awe-struck faces the men watched me. Never had such sacrilege been committed. Why did the vindictive god permit it? What mysterious power did I hold over him? There could be but one explanation to their minds. I, the son of Kukulcan, the Itzimin Chac, Controller of Thunder and Lightning; Bearer of the Symbol, Wielder of the Consuming Fire, was greater, more powerful than Kinich Ahau. He bowed to my will, dared make no protest. In my service they were safe, and slowly, half-fearfully, they rose, grasped their weapons and watched my every move. Now I was commanding [illegible] I had [illegible] portion of the idol within my reach. I grasped the flexed right arm of the idol to swing myself to his knees. The arm moved! Remembering the gigantic image at the entrance to the Cave of the Bats, I tugged at it, cautiously, watchfully, for there was no knowing how the mechanism operated. I could not know whether the thing would tip up, swing aside or drop down. Deep indrawn breaths of wonder and fear came from the men. The prince stared wide-eyed. Slowly the arm swung, and as it moved, the great golden disc revolved; the entire statue and dais sank to one side. I leaped down. Where the statue had stood was an opening in the floor with steps leading downwards. Kinchi Haman had escaped that way. We had lost valuable, precious time.

Shouting to the others to follow, I sprang down the steps. Close at my heels came the prince, but the men remained behind. They had reached the utter limit of their courage. To attempt to urge them, to command them to follow would, I knew, be useless; it would be merely a waste of time, and with no fear of results, contemptuous of the cowardly high-priest who kidnaped women and ran away at our approach, I hurried on. Fifty feet more and we came into a sudden blaze of light in the open air. On every side rose high, massive walls. Far above our heads rose the mighty temple with the swaying, gaseous flames at its summit. To right and left were low, rambling buildings with inward sloping walls and doorways. Beyond, and facing us, was a low mound before an image of the Sun God.

I dashed towards the nearest doorway, that of the building to the left. The carved wooden door swung open, and from within came shrieks, screams, shrill cries. I halted in my tracks at the sight that greeted me. The place was filled with women! Half-naked, clad in single garments of white, they crowded back, wild-eyed, shrieking hysterically. Instantly I realized who they were, what they were doing here. They were Virgins of the Sun, girls doomed to sacrifice, to that awful symbolic wedding to Kinich Ahau; maidens, who before the dawning of another day, would be cast into the sacred well, if Kinchi Haman lived that long. A single rapid glance was enough to assure us he was not here. A single glance told me that my Itza was not among the terrified girls.

Where was she? Where was the high priest? We shouted to the poor things, tried to calm them, to reassure them. But though they ceased their screams, they were still panic-stricken, panting, as wild-eyed and breathless as frightened deer. Had they seen Kinchi Haman? Had they seen Itza? There was no reply. They might have been deaf and dumb. But Azcopil's quietly put questions met with better results. A tall, queenly girl recognized him. With an effort she controlled her voice. "She—Itza—she is there!" she gasped, pointing with trembling hand to the right. "Kinchi Haman—he—is there. He—he prepares the—the others; the first to be Kinich Ahau's brides."

Before her last words were uttered, I had dashed to the door. Behind me Azcopil raced, panting, as I rushed for the building on the right. My Itza there! That hideous, bestial, devilish priest with her! Hot blood raced through my veins, my brain seemed on fire. I longed to tear the priest limb from limb with my own hands, to kill him by inches. For the time being I was a savage, a wild beast. The door was fastened! In vain we hurled ourselves upon it, battered at it, hacked at it. Dimly from within came screams, piercing shrieks. I seemed to recognize Itza's voice. Madly, [illegible] I threw myself at the door.

A [illegible] seized me, shook me. "The magic tube; Itzan!" he yelled in my ears. "Quick! See, the [illegible] are of metal!"

WITH a jerk I came back to my senses. Unstopping the tube, I pointed it at the massive metal fastenings, trembling, shaking, filled with dread that the thing would prove useless. But I need not have feared. Like ice under the rays of the sun the metal fused, the door sagged, with a splintering crash it fell, and we sprang within. Figures materialized from nowhere. I saw weapons flash. I heard Azcopil utter a savage cry. I felt my sword bite into yielding flesh. A searing pain shot through my left arm. And with the stabbing pain of the wound my brain cleared. I remembered the bamboo tube, and dropping my sword, I drew the stopper and swung the thing about. In the darkness dazzling spots and flashes of blinding incandescence appeared as the rays played upon weapons, breastplates, metal caps and shields. Agonized yells and groans rent the air; the horrible smell of burning flesh filled our nostrils. Falling, writhing, ghastly forms were dimly outlined by the reflected light from molten metal. Then, only the last sobbing moans of dying men, the faint sound of frying, sizzling human flesh—and silence.

I shouted to the prince, fearful that he had been cut down, dreading that in the darkness and confusion I might have destroyed him by the terrible ray. But his reply came from close at hand; he was alive, unhurt. Leaping across the bodies, guided by a glimmer of light beyond, we dashed aside a hanging, and blinking, half-

Where the prince had [illegible] on [illegible]

blinded by the light, stood in a small cell-like chamber. Objects of apparel were strewn about, a jar of water had been upset, remains of food were scattered over the floor, tapestries upon the walls were torn down. Everything pointed to a struggle within the room, but there was no human being to be seen. With a choking cry I leaped forward.

Gleaming amid the tumbled cushions and coverings of a couch was the golden chain whose missing links had been caught in the secret doorway of the tunnel leading to my palace. Itza had been here! She had fought. The screams I had heard had been hers! Where—Oh God! Where was she now? Had——

A faint, smothered cry came from the rear of the room, seemingly from behind a tapestry on the wall. With a yell of rage, shouting Itza! Itza! I dashed across the room, swept the cloth aside and sprang through the narrow doorway that it concealed. A dozen strides along a narrow passage and I was in the open air once more. And at the scene that met my horrified eyes, I felt sick and faint; my blood seemed to congeal in my veins, my heart seemed to stop beating. I seemed powerless to move. I was rooted to the spot, paralyzed. Within thirty paces of where I stood was the statue of the sun God above the low mound. At its feet, bound, gagged, helpless, lay Itza, while above her, gloating, hideous, clad in sacrificial robes, his arms upraised as though exhorting the monstrous god before him, was Kinchi Haman, a long-bladed, obsidian knife gripped in one hand!

"The sacrifice!" gasped Azcopil, who unnoticed had reached my side.

His words broke the awful spell. I was galvanized into life, into swift understanding. An instant before I had been bereft of sense, of conscious thought. Unutterable horror had possessed my every faculty. But now my brain felt strangely, abnormally clear and calm. To move, to cry out would mean Itza's instant death.

At any second the priest might strike. There was but one chance, one hope of saving Itza from the terrible fate that threatened her. Noiselessly I drew my revolver from its holster. Slowly, with steady hand, I raised the weapon until the ivory bead upon the barrel covered the priest's back. With a prayer to God that I might not miss, I pulled the trigger.

A piercing shriek drowned the roar of the report. Through the haze of smoke, I saw the priest double up. The knife fell flashing from his hand; he swayed, half-turned, reeled backward, and with a second wild despairing scream, vanished utterly!

But I was already half way across the intervening space. I sprang towards the mound, towards Itza stretched upon the altar on the farther side. There was a sharp warning cry from Azcopil, his hand gripped my collar and I was jerked gasping, half-choked, to one side. And in the nick of time! Almost at my feet, concealed by the encircling mound, yawned a seemingly bottomless pit black, awesome, ominous. The prince had saved my life, had saved me from a horrible fate. Another stride and I would have plunged into the depths of the sacred well, into the gruesome waters that had closed forever over Kinchi Haman.

CHAPTER XIX

Long Live the King

ITZA was unconscious but unharmed. She had fainted and had been spared the maddening horror of lying on the altar and the awful suspense of awaiting sacrifice. Swiftly I tore away the choking gag that bruised her lips, and slashed through the cords that cut into her poor wrists and ankles.

Lifting her limp body tenderly, I carried her into the house of the Virgins of the Sun, and when presently her senses returned, she found herself in my arms and looked into my eyes which, like her own, were dim with tears of happiness.

Almost as happy as myself, the prince smiled down at her, while all about us the Virgins of the Sun hovered half-timidly and murmured soft words of sympathy and delight, for having been told of Kinchi Haman's death and assured that the sacrifices to the Sun God were at an end, they had forgotten their fears and had ministered to Itza, chafing her hands and bathing her forehead.

For a space we were oblivious to everything but our own great joy. We were in a world of our own, a world unknown to all but reunited lovers, until Itza noticed my bleeding, lacerated arm—which I had quite forgotten myself—and instantly she was all pity and solicitude. By the time the wounds had been washed and bandaged, Itza declared herself as strong and well as ever, and accompanied by the freed girls—who now would never become brides of Kinich Ahau—we retraced our way through the hidden passages of the temple.

As we passed once more through that circular room with its monstrous image of the Sun God, I delayed a moment and having swung the massive idol into place, I turned the gift of Nohul Voh upon the golden disc on the statue's chest. Before the amazed and wondering eyes of all, the metal fused and melted and forever closed the only way that led to the dismal well that formed the grave of Kinchi Haman. Out from the temple and into the waning sunlight of the afternoon we came at last, to find our men, cowering, shamefaced, surrounded by the awed, half-curious, half-terrified crowd awaiting they knew not what. From the lips of our wild-eyed men they had heard of what had transpired, of our having entered the holy of holies, of my desecration of the sacred image, and had Kinich Ahau appeared in the flesh to wreak vengeance upon us, had the sun itself descended in righteous wrath, had the temple crumpled to bits to bury us beneath its ruins, the people would not have been surprised. But surprise and inexpressible wonder was theirs when they saw us emerge, unharmed, with Itza, and accompanied by the Virgins of the Sun. For a moment every sound, every voice was hushed, and then from thousands of throats a mighty cheer arose and with one accord the people prostrated themselves before us. And as the released maidens sought relatives and loved ones, and spread the news of the high priest's end, shouts of joy, cries of delight mingled in a bedlam of sound. It was as if a terrible incubus had been lifted from the city, and as the joyful people pressed about us, we were compelled to call upon our guards to force a way through which we could pass to the palace.

Behind us rose the great silent temple; from its summit the lambent banners of fire beckoned to me to be gone, pointed towards the spot where I knew the Bridge of Light still spanned the chasm. The way was clear; I was impatient to be gone. I knew that at any time the flaming signal might fade, the bridge might vanish, yet I could not leave. I was utterly exhausted, done. I had been under a terrific strain, my wounded arm ached and throbbed, and the reaction, now that it was all over and Itza was safe and in no further danger, left me weak, unnerved and utterly spent.

And there was Itza. Hardships, suffering, dangers known and unknown must be faced and overcome if we fled the valley and forced a way out to civilization, even though we found the way of the Symbols. A woman of my own race would have had no chance of getting through, and even Itza, a Maya, an Indian, would find it so difficult, would have to endure so much that, at times,

I had abandoned all thoughts of attempting it and had resigned myself to remaining forever in Mictolan. And she had suffered, had been under a strain that had left her as unfitted for such an undertaking as myself. Until we had rested, had regained strength and nerves, nothing could be done. Better to remain for the rest of my life in Mictolan with Itza than to lose her and perish in the unknown wilderness.

But there was one thing I *was* determined I would do before I threw my weary, aching body upon my couch and sought the rest, the blessed unconsciousness of sleep, that my throbbing head and burning eyes craved beyond all else. It was the eve of Tonalmatl, the most sacred, most holy day of the year, and the people would be gathering, hopefully, faithfully, expectantly awaiting the ceremony of the Setting Sun on this last evening of the dying year. If I failed them at this critical moment, who could say what dire results might follow.

They were restless, keyed up, in that tense psychological state where riot, revolt, unreasoning mob violence might leap into flame at the first spark. Within the past few hours their traditions, their beliefs, their superstitions—even their religion—had been turned topsy-turvy. Their greatest temple had been desecrated, their Sun God defied, their high priest killed. Events had occurred too rapidly, revolutionary inexplicable things had followed one another too quickly for the people to be able to collect their thoughts, to reason, to fully realize what had happened. They were confused, astounded, amazed, frightened. They were for us at the moment, though in their superstitious minds they regarded me as the all-powerful, incarnated representative of the mighty Kukulcan, and felt relieved that the bloody tyrannical priest Kinich Ahau had been destroyed. Yet they might swing the other way on the slightest provocation.

If I failed to appear upon the temple, if I failed to maintain my power and my ascendancy, they might turn again to their Sun God. They might reason that their gods had deserted them, that Kinich Ahau was angered at the death of his priest and at being cheated of his virginal brides, and they might seek to appease him by wholesale sacrifices—even by seizing Itza.

Moreover—though I am loath to admit it—though I may lay myself open to charges of blasphemy and paganism, I felt a strong desire to stand before that lofty altar and give thanks to my God for His guidance and His protection, for His infinite mercy in having restored my beloved Itza safe and unharmed to my arms. No doubt, to many, to those who have never been in such a situation, who are accustomed to praying in the dim sanctity of their churches, who regard any faith but their own as infidel, the mere thought of offering prayers and thanks to God before a pagan altar and at the feet of a pagan idol will be horrifying, blasphemous. But to one who has dwelt long among those of other religions than his own, to one who has learned how deep-seated, how sublime is their faith, how rigorously, unalterably they strive to live up to its tenets, how absolute their trust in their own gods, one religion seems about as good as another.

And though I had no tendency to lean towards the religion and the gods of Mictolan, though I had no faith in Kukulcan nor in Kinich Ahau, yet I realized that, to the people of the valley, the temple was as hallowed, as sacred as our own churches and cathedrals were to us.

A Protestant may not believe in the Roman Catholic Church, a Hebrew may not believe in Christ, an Atheist may not believe in Almighty God, a Christian may not believe in Mahomet, a Mohammedan may not believe in Buddha, yet each respects the places of worship of the others. Each—though in his heart he may scoff at—revile the others' faith—feels, when he enters the church, mosque or temple of the others that he is in a sacred spot; despite himself, he is impressed, awed; so it was with me when I stood above the city before the altar of the temple of the Plumed Serpent.

THERE was something inexpressibly impressing and sublime about the place. Standing there on the narrow terrace of that towering pile that had been erected centuries before the dawn of Christianity, whose gods had been worshipped by millions before the birth of Moses, one seemed apart from the world, lifted above the petty things of life, exalted, nearer to one's Creator, closer to God. And so, as with weary steps I toiled up the ascent and at last stood at the temple-top bathed in the glory of the setting sun, and gazed across that fair green valley and the silent, peaceful city, and looked down upon the shadowy sea of upturned expectant faces, a great peace came to me. The world for all its faults was very, very beautiful; it was good to be alive, to feel that there was one you loved and who loved you in return; that there were those to whom you were very dear, to whom you meant so much. Dropping to my knees, I poured out my thanks to God, prayed that He might guide and protect us and besought His blessings and His mercy for the coming year. Then, rising, I addressed the hushed and silent crowd below. Tomorrow, I reminded them, would be the day of Tonalmatl. The cruel sacrifices of Kinich Ahau were done away with forever, the inhuman priest had been swallowed up in his own accursed well. The gods had forsaken him as all knew. They had shown that his rituals, his sacrifices were wrong—and I pointed dramatically to the silent, deserted Temple of the Sun where no priest stood outlined in the glare of the wavering, lambent flames at the summit.

"O, people of Mictolan," I cried. "Let peace and happiness come to all with the dawning of the Tonalmatl! Let this be a day of thanksgiving and of joy. Forget the past and Kinchi Haman, and celebrate the coming of the New Year by placing the Prince Azcopil upon the throne of Mictolan."

For a moment there was absolute silence. Then a thunderous cheer arose, and as the last crimson glow of the sunset faded from the sky, I descended the temple stairs, reached the plaza, and staggered like a drunken man towards my waiting litter. A dozen willing, eager arms caught me, lifted me. Dimly as in a dream I felt myself sink among the soft robes and cushions, I felt the swaying, lulling motion of my hurrying bearers and then—oblivion.

WHEN I again opened my eyes, nearly twenty-four hours had passed. Itza was beside me—starry-eyed, beautiful, watchfully tender. I drew her to me and for long lay there, silent, perfectly at peace, sublimely happy in the presence of her yielding body, the gentle throbbing of her heart against my breast, the warm sweet touch of her lips.

At last, gently releasing herself, she spoke, asking me how I felt, if my wounded arm pained me, if I were rested, if I was not hungry. For answer I sprang up, seized her with my good arm, hugged her until she begged for mercy, and told her I was hungry enough to eat her up. I felt like a new man. I was rested, strong; my nerves were as steady as ever, and I ate ravenously—like a famished wolf. And though my wounded left arm still pained and throbbed it was far better, and I could use it to some extent. Had I slept long? I asked between mouthfuls. Where was the prince? Had Nohul Voh been around? Had anything occurred while I had been lost to the world?

Itza laughed gaily, merrily, and her eyes twinkled

mischievously. "Had anything occurred?" she reiterated. "Did her Itzimin think then that the whole world awaited his awakening with bated breath? Did he think he could sleep from sundown until the next afternoon without anything occurring?" Then, snuggling close and ceasing her teasing, she chattered all the news. Yes, Nohul Voh had been there. He had dressed my arm, had assured Itza that it would be healed and well in a few days, and had promised to come again. The prince; well the prince had been far too busy to call. But she forgot; there was no longer any prince. It was King Azcopil now. The people had obeyed my wishes, they had demanded that Azcopil should become their ruler, and though he begged that they should wait until I could be present at the coronation, they insisted that as I had called upon them to make him king on the morning of the Tonalmatl, they must obey me or Kukulcan might be offended. The coronation of a king in Mictolan was not, it appeared, a very formal, complicated nor long-drawn-out ceremony. It was, however, spectacular, as vividly described by Itza, and I rather regretted I could not have been present. But I was glad they did not wait.

When dealing with Indians, delays are dangerous, there is nothing like striking while the iron is hot, and, as Itza prattled on—her sentences punctuated by kisses—I was delighted to learn that the new king had already asserted his authority in the right direction. He had announced that with the beginning of his reign, Kukulcan should be the paramount god of Mictolan. That the people would be free to worship Kinich Ahau and that the priests of the Sun God's cult might hold their ceremonies in their temple, but that all the old practices were at an end. There should be no secrets within it. It must be open to the public. No human sacrifices of any sort should be held.

These were drastic measures, and Azcopil alone might have met with strong opposition, or worse. But he had made old Nohul Voh his Prime Minister, and the people were in superstitious awe of the sorcerer. They feared him and his mysterious powers, next to the gods themselves, and the old fellow took full advantage of his authority. He had ever been an enemy of Kinchi Haman. Being of the House of Cocome Voh, and of the Titul Zius clan, he was preëminently, by descent, by tradition and by faith of the cult of the Plumed Serpent, and he regarded Kinich Ahau as a secondary lesser deity—indeed as scarcely a deity at all. As he had told me, Mictolan had been originally dedicated to Kukulcan; for generations its tutelar deity was the Plumed Serpent, and not until Kinchi Haman rose to power, by his own machinations and ruthless acts, had the Sun God been raised to prominence. And finally, to be revered as the Supreme God.

From the beginning I had suspected that Nohul Voh's underlying purpose had been to restore the old order of things, and now that Kinchi Haman had met his deserved end, now that the legitimate king ruled over the valley, and now that the old sorcerer found himself the right hand man of the king, he asserted himself. He had thundered at the people, had related the prophecies, had declared that my coming had been to reestablish the supremacy of Kukulcan, that the death of the hunchback priest had been his punishment at the hands of the Plumed Serpent.

He had assured the people that I had destroyed the Monster of Sacrifices, that Kinchi Haman had hoodwinked and deceived them, that while posing as a priest of the Sun God he had secretly offered sacrifices to the false gods of people who had occupied the valley before the coming of the Mayas, and he had ended by foretelling the most dire calamities and most awful results to all, if the people failed to obey their new king.

As Itza told of this I began to feel that I had become hopelessly entangled in the net of circumstances that I had helped to weave. I had become, willy-nilly, the high-priest of Kukulcan. The only other devotees of the Plumed Serpent god were the acolytes and lay-brothers—if I may use the term—of the temple, and if Kukulcan was to be *the* god of the people, they would naturally expect to have the ceremonies continued with pomp and regularity. And I had no desire and no intention of devoting my life to acting as a Mayan high priest. Within a few days I planned to leave the valley—if Itza were willing—and I began to wonder if I would not meet with opposition on the part of Azcopil and Nohul Voh.

I WAS still puzzling my brain as to how I could manage matters when the newly-crowned king arrived with the old sorcerer. They repeated all that Itza had told me, with even more minute details, and complimented me upon my rapid recovery and my appearance. That Azcopil could have gone through so much without a sign of physical exhaustion and, with a few hours sleep, could have gone through with the ceremonies and duties of the day, amazed me more than anything else. But he had not been under the mental strain I had suffered, and he had the wiry, tireless almost incredible endurance of the Indian. Of course I congratulated him upon his coronation and voiced my approval of the new rules he had promulgated.

Old Nohul Voh smiled and chuckled. "He but followed out thy desires, O, Itzimin Chac," he declared. "Did not my son tell us of the one God of his faith? Did he not give the rituals of his own faith upon the temple, though the people thought he spoke in the secret tongue of the cult, and I alone—with perhaps the maiden Itza—know it was not so? And did not my lord overthrow the power of Kinich Ahau and destroy the Kinchi Haman with his thunder tube, and defy the Sun God even within the sanctity of his own temple?

The wise man, O, Itzimin, observes and gives thought; the fool stubs his toe against the rock. Does not the farmer nurture the sweetest melon? Does not he remove the thorn vine that tears his flesh? Does the woodsman stand in the path of the falling tree and command it to fall aside? Does not one know that when the sun shines the rain will cease? And can one man, O my son, serve two masters? Nay, Itzimin Chac. Always in the world is one thing stronger or better than another. Always there is the good and the bad. Always there is the right and the wrong. Always one must bow to someone more powerful. And though the wrong may endure for a time, though the bad may be so twisted as to seem good, always in the end that which is good, that which is right, that which is strong, shall endure. Much have you told me of your people—much that seems beyond belief did I not know by the prophecies that it was so. Safely you have come through the dangers that barred the way to Mictolan, though you are not of the race of Kitche Maya. And you have triumphed over the Kinchi Haman, and through you, King Azcopil is ruler over Mictolan. Only in one way could you have done all this, my son; only by the help of that one God you worship. And so Nohul Voh, who is wise and has lived through many Katuns, and Azcopil, my king, who knows your heart, know that your God is the greatest god and that to us He is known as Kukulcan."

I was a bit dazed and tremendously astonished at this long and most surprising declaration of the old sorcerer. That he had become convinced that I was under divine protection, that he—as well as others— should have concluded that my God must be most powerful to have safeguarded me from the vengeance of Kinich Ahau,

would not have been surprising. Indeed, it would have been exactly in line with their psychology. But that they—that Nohul Voh, should have decided to adopt the God I worshipped, that they should have practically cast down their ancient, supreme Sun God and thus completely revolutionize their religion and their mythology, and that, by some incomprehensible manner of reasoning they should have identified the Plumed Serpent as God Almighty, was actually astounding. To a missionary—to good jolly old Padre José in fact—it would have been most gratifying to learn that the people had been so won over from their heathen practices and multiplicity of pagan gods. But I was no missionary; my religious activities had been forced upon me, and my only interest in their spiritual past, present or future lay in whether or not I had been appointed the head of their new church without being consulted in the matter; whether I was expected to continue to act the part of a priest, or whether I were free to follow my own inclinations in the matter. I was, in fact, about to put the question and settle it then and there when Nohul Voh's next words answered it for me.

He had examined my arm, had dressed the cuts, which were already healing, and he had declared that in three days more it would be as well as ever. Then, as he turned to go, he glanced keenly at me. "My son," he said, "though the Monster of Sacrifices will never more devour a maiden of Mictolan, yet the flames still stream from the temple. The Bridge of Light spans the chasm. The Way of the Symbols is open."

There was no doubt as to the meaning of his words. The hint was broad, plain enough. I was free to go—in fact the old fellow seemed anxious to have me go. What did it mean? Had he read my thoughts? Did he merely remember that I had wished to leave the valley with Itza and so realize that I could never be happy here? Or had he decided that my presence in Mictolan was not wholly desirable?

I couldn't say, and I didn't care. If Itza was willing, if she still wanted to leave her home and with me attempt to reach the outside world, we would start as soon as possible. But if she hesitated, if she wavered, I would remain, would abandon all thoughts of leaving. I would far rather remain in the valley forever than to make her unhappy, to cause her to pine for Mictolan and her people, to have her regret ever having left the valley. It would not be much of a hardship for me to remain there. I had Itza, I would have plenty to occupy my mind, to keep me busy and interested, I would be well-to-do, I would occupy a far higher and more important position than I could ever hope for among my own people.

Why, after all, did I want to leave? I really could not explain it myself. It was not homesickness, not a desire to be among my own race. I had been too much of a wanderer, had made my home in too many lands, among too many diverse and alien people, to miss the companionship of those of my race, to have any sentimental or patriotic longings. In fact I had no real home. To be sure I was an American by birth, but I had spent but a comparatively small portion of my life in the States. London, Madrid, Lima, Mexico, La Paz; the wild heights of the Andes, the silent jungles of the Amazon, the deserts of Peru; the Gran Chaco, the Llanos; Broadway, Piccadilly, the Prado of Havana, the Plazas de Armas of scores of Latin cities were all equally familiar, equally dear or equally unimportant to me. Nowhere had I a family or relations, nowhere but in Mictolan had I a heart interest, or truer, dearer friends.

Whatever it was, it was there. As long as the flames rose above the temple they would beckon me, urge me to be gone, and I hoped and prayed that if Itza decided she preferred to remain, the Bridge of Light might vanish forever, thus putting an end to my longings and my hopes.

But Itza was as anxious to go as I was to have her. Indeed, she was, if anything, more enthusiastic. I knew the dangers, the hardships, the sufferings that faced us. I could foresee the weary miles, the dense jungles, the terrific mountains, the impassable streams, the vast wilderness that we would be forced to traverse. Even if we found that semi-mythical Way of the Symbols—in which I confess I had little faith—it would be no child's play, no picnic to wander for days through the unexplored country to some remote outpost of civilization. But Itza knew nothing of this. She had no kith or kin in Mictolan; she was an orphan, she had no ties other than me to bind her or hold her, and to tell the truth, her experiences had not been conducive to developing any great fondness for her native valley or her own people.

In vain I tried—now that she had expressed her willingness and desire to go—to dissuade her. I pointed out all the difficulties, the dangers. I tried to picture her life among strangers, aliens. I dilated on the dreary winters, the bitter cold of the north. But the more I said the more—woman like—she was determined to go. She would enjoy it, she was sure. With me to love her and to be loved by her she could be happy anywhere. Hardships, dangers meant nothing. Had she not been through far worse dangers, through greater sufferings? She wanted to see all the marvelous things I had related to her. She wanted to dwell among my people, to speak my language, to see the oceans. And after all I could not blame her. All her life—short as it was—had been spent in this one valley. All she knew, all she could imagine of the world was what she could see, hear and know in Mictolan. Beyond the valley was another world, a vast, unknown, undreamed of universe, as fascinating, as filled with real and imaginary wonders as another planet would have been to me.

I WOULD have set out that very day had my arm been fully recovered. At any moment, at any time the flames might disappear, the bridge might vanish. But that was a chance that had to be taken. To start off with a bad arm would have been more than foolhardy even on an ordinary expedition into the jungles. And to set forth on such a perilous, desperate venture as ours, with the handicap of a partly disabled arm would have been nothing short of suicidal. So, resigning myself to fate, I waited for the days to pass until my wounds were fully healed and my arm was again strong and whole. Each morning at dawn I gazed, half-fearfully, at the temple top; a dozen times a day my eyes turned to it; often in the night I would steal from Itza's side and peer into the soft effulgent light to assure myself the flames were still there. As Nohul Voh had said, the wounds healed in three days—his knowledge of herbs, drugs and cures was profound indeed, but it was ten days before full strength had returned to my lacerated arm.

Meanwhile I had kept my mind busy. I had spent many hours with Nohul Voh. I had been much with Azcopil, who with his queen were still our closest, dearest friends, and I had devoted no little time to adding to the mechanical advancement of the people. One thing I had done that pleased the people and amazed them immensely was to cast a large bronze bell for the temple. It was not a difficult job. The people were excellent metal workers, there was plenty of copper and silver, and it was merely a matter of making a mould and of smelting enough of the copper-silver alloy in several hundred crucibles at one time. Bells of small size and

of the sleigh-bell type were common, they were made of copper, silver and gold, but no one had ever before seen a large bell or a bell of the conventional type. Hence they had no idea what they were making, and, in order to surprise and impress them, I kept the matter a profound secret until the bell was finished. Then with infinite trouble and labor, it had been hauled and hoisted up the temple and hung beside the altar.

When all was in readiness and, standing upon the altar, I seized the heavy copper maul I had provided, and with all my strength swung it against the bell and the deep melodious tones rang out across the valley, the people rushed crowding to the streets and stared in dumb wonder.

Many could not at first locate the sound, and jumped and stared about and shaded their eyes and peered into the sky, striving to see the thing that emitted the strange, unknown sound. But presently all knew, and with wild shouts of joy, cried that their god was now speaking to them. Indeed, to them, this ringing, musical voice of their god was far more impressive, more convincing than any prayers or rituals I or any other priest had ever uttered. That they could not interpret the sounds made no difference; they were no more unintelligible than my words had been, and to have the deity speak to them directly, instead of through the medium of a human being, impressed them beyond belief. Moreover, it solved the problem of finding a priest to take my place, a problem thatNohul Voh, Azcopil and I had discussed at length, for the sorcerer and the king both knew that as soon as my arm was strong, I planned to leave them. But now there was no need of another priest. Any acolyte or temple attendant could mount to the great bell and pound upon it with the maul at sunrise and sunset.

ONLY once more did I ascend to the temple altar. Perhaps I did wrong, perhaps I may be severely criticized. But however that may be, the idea struck me to plant the symbol of the Christian faith on the spot where I had recited Christian prayers so often. And I have often wondered since, what would be thought if, at some distant time, explorers or archeologists should penetrate to Mictolan, and upon the deserted forgotten temple of the Plumed Serpent, they should find a bronze bell and a Christian cross beside the great stone idol of Kukulcan.

There was nothing now to delay our going. My arm was as strong as ever, the flames still streamed from the temple of Kinich Ahau, the Bridge of Light still spanned the chasm at the Cave of the Bats. We planned to leave secretly, to slip away without attracting the attention of the people, without their knowledge.

There were three reasons for this. In the first place, the people might object to my deserting them. In the second place, there was the prophecy foretelling that the bearer of the Book of Kukulcan would lead the people from Mictolan to reestablish the ancient empire of their race, and they might insist on accompanying me; while in the third place, as Nohul Voh naively suggested, my mysterious disappearance would be quite in keeping with my supposedly divine character and would do much to strengthen the people's faith in Kukulcan.

So, accompanied by the king and the old sorcerer, who insisted on seeing us off, we left the palace before dawn, and silently and unseen, hurried along that broad straight avenue down which I had come with Itza so many months before. How the others felt as we walked through the chill air on that memorable morning I do not know. But I for one felt more excited, more keyed up than ever in my life before. I was starting on a strange, a perilous adventure, and with me I was taking Itza into dangers no one could foresee. And as I gazed about at the well-known scene, at the silent, flat-roofed houses, at the green fields and gigantic vegetation, at the frowning encircling mountains that hid the valley's secret from all the world, at the lofty temples spectral in the morning mist, a lump rose in my throat and I felt —strange thought as it was—much as I imagine a man must feel when he is going to his execution. I was leaving all this forever. Suddenly all seemed very dear to me, even the spidery windmills—incongruous things in this isolated valley seemed like old familiar friends, and had Itza at that moment changed her mind, I would willingly have turned back. But she was all excitement, all gaiety, all agog with the spirit of adventure.

At last we reached the entrance to the tunnel. I glanced back. Yes, the flames were rising above the Temple of the Sun, streaming straight upward in the still morning air. From where I had secreted them in a crevice of the rocks, I took my torches, my pack of provisions, and strapped them on my back. And then, to my amazement, Itza, with a merry laugh, rolled aside a rock and dragging out a second pack, adjusted it on her own lovely shoulders. In vain I protested. It was nothing, she declared. She hardly felt it. And we might need it. Why should her Itzimin carry all the burden? Was she not to eat her share of food? Why then should she not carry her share? Nohul Voh and Azcopil stood by her. It was useless to argue against three, and so, with a kiss and a caress, I gave in. A dozen paces more and before us was the black chasm spanned by the dazzling, iridescent, wondrous bridge of light. Fear, distrust, doubt filled me. I had crossed it before, yet try as I might I could not force myself to step from the firm hard stone onto that transparent, tenuous glow.

But Itza had no such fears. Swiftly she embraced King Azcopil, she threw her arms about Nohul Voh and planted a farewell kiss upon his cheek, and with a merry laugh and a wave of her hand stepped confidently from the verge of the rock. My heart skipped a beat, I uttered an involuntary cry as she did so. It seemed impossible that she would not be dashed to death in the abyss. But no. She might have been treading solid metal. Lightly she ran forward, calling me to follow. With a last clasp of my hand I stammered farewells to my two friends, and with gritted teeth and summoning all my courage, I stepped onto the incredible bridge and hurried after Itza.

A moment more and she sprang upon the ledge on the farther side. Turning, she waved her hand to the two men. Ten feet, five, three, separated me from her. Another stride and I would be beside her. And then, suddenly, without warning, the thing vanished under my feet. As if in a horrible nightmare I felt dropping into eternity. A wild despairing shriek came from my lips. I clutched wildly. My fingers gripped the rock, my toes dug into a crevice. With all my strength I fought to drag myself up. But the precipice was undercut and I could exert no leverage. I felt myself slipping, going. Then hands gripped my hair, my scalp seemed about to be torn from my head. With a last convulsive kick, a supreme effort, I felt my chest upon the ledge. Faint, half-senseless, with half my body and my legs dangling over the awful chasm, I was powerless to move another inch. But Itza's fingers were twisted firmly in my long hair. She had braced herself against an outjutting ledge, and she was by no means a puny weakling. Panting, tugging—each jerk bringing agonized groans from my lips—she dragged me to safety at last. I had escaped an awful death by the narrowest margin. Had the Bridge of Light failed ten, five seconds—even one second sooner, nothing could have prevented me from

being hurled to the depths of the abyss. I shuddered as I thought of it, shuddered still more at thought of what would have happened had the bridge ceased while Itza was crossing, if it had vanished with Itza on one side and myself on the other. And I thanked God that my left arm had not gone back on me. But I owed my life to Itza, to Itza whom I had thought too weak to withstand the dangers to be faced! She had dropped beside me and, woman-like now that the peril was past, she had burst into tears, sobbing out how terrified she had been, begging me to tell her if I were injured, pleading she was so sorry she had hurt me.

Controlling my shaken nerves, pulling myself together with an effort, I scrambled to my feet, raised her tenderly, and laughing at her fears stifled her sobs with kisses. Steeling myself to see that horrible chasm, I looked across to where Azcopil and Nohul Voh still stood. Then, waving our hands to them, shouting that all was well, we turned and entered the Cave of the Bats.

We had left Mictolan forever. There was no going back.

CHAPTER XX

The Way of the Symbols

THERE is little more to tell, for our adventures really ended when we crossed the Bridge of Light. I had come through the Cave of the Bats in the dark, blindly, wandering, lost. By merest luck I had found the exit where Itza and I now stood. But this time I had enough excellent torches to burn for hours, and lighting one of these, I held it up and peered about in its ruddy glare. I had no idea of the direction whence I had come, whether I had turned, doubled, run in circles or had followed a reasonably straight course on my former trip. I was not by any means sure how far I had come nor how much time I had spent in the cavern. Hence I had decided that the safest and surest —even if not the shortest—way of finding the entrance by which I had come would be to follow the wall of the cave. I felt confident there were no other exits, for had such existed the people would not have devoted so much care and labor to concealing the entrance by means of the great tilting idol. But we had not proceeded fifty feet—with Itza clinging to me and trembling with vague fears of the dismal place—when I found that my scheme was wholly impracticable.

There was no wall. Huge stalactites and stalagmites joined to form innumerable columns in the labyrinth of grottoes, narrow passages, galleries and corridors leading for unknown distances. The mountain was literally honeycombed with a maze of tunnels and caves. Any one of the countless openings might lead to the entrance, and to explore them all would take months—perhaps years. More than ever I realized how fortune or fate or Providence had guided my footsteps before. And more than ever I realized how difficult we would find it to cross the cave and reach the entrance we sought.

I halted, tried to collect my thoughts, to reason calmly, to concentrate upon the matter. The opening through which we had come was still visible, the morning sun streaming into it. As nearly as I could calculate, it faced southeast. I revisualized the surroundings of the tilting idol at the other entrance, and felt sure it faced the north. I have a rather remarkable sense of direction and I felt certain that I was not mistaken in this. In that case, one entrance would be almost directly opposite the other. Of course it might be far to one side or the other, far to the east or west, but if we followed a straight course towards the north, we must eventually reach the limits of the cavern, and even if we did not see the light that indicated the opening, we could move east or west until we located it. And it would not be difficult to follow a straight line. By noting some peculiarity of a stone column ahead of us, and sighting back to the still visible entrance, we could move forward. Then we could select another column ahead, smudge the one beside which we stood with smoke, and move to the next. There were so many columns that it would be easy to align our course even after we lost sight of the entrance behind us.

Chatting to Itza to encourage her, and explaining my scheme to her, we started on. It was slow work. We had to use care, but all seemed to be going well. We had proceeded for at least an hour. I felt that at any time we might catch a glimpse of the light in the entrance ahead, when Itza uttered a surprized exclamation: "The symbol!" she cried. "See, Itzimin, there on the stone!"

I peered at the spot she indicated. She was right. Clearly outlined on the surface of an upjutting mass of rock was the deeply-cut symbol of Kukulcan with the reed and foot. But it pointed at right angles to the course we were following!

I was puzzled. Had we lost our way, had we become confused and was the symbol right, or did the symbol point the way to another entrance? Should we follow it—perhaps to find that in the ages that had passed since it had been cut, the entrance it led to had been blocked by débris? Or should we ignore it and continue on our course? Then I remembered that, in the vision I had seen, the same symbol was cut there in the valley near the giant tilting idol. That then must be the only exit; the symbol must lead to it. But how, where could we find the next mark? If we left the spot, if we wandered about hunting here, there and everywhere for the next symbol and failed to locate it, could we ever find our way back to the place where we stood, and could we again proceed in the straight line we were following? My torch illuminated only a small area of the cavern, we would have to search very carefully, very slowly for the mark, and there was the chance—the certainty almost—that many, if not most of the symbols, had been covered with the stalactitic material during the countless centuries. Suddenly memory of Nohul Voh's enigmatical words flashed across my mind, the words he had uttered when he had given me the bamboo tube that had served me so well and so mysteriously in the temple: "It may serve you well within that Cavern of the Bats." Strange that I should have forgotten it. What had the old sorcerer meant? Had he merely uttered generalities, meaning it might answer as a torch to light our way, or was there a deeper, hidden meaning?

Personally I couldn't see how the thing would help us any in our present quandary, but Itza—who was ever in awe of Nohul Voh and his strange knowledge and seemingly mystic powers—insisted that it would. Curious to see what the result would be, I dug it out of my pack, unstoppered the end, and flashed its rays upon the rock with the carved symbol. As the strange red glare suffused the stone, I jumped as if I had sat on a lively hornet, and stood gaping in amazement. The symbol stood out in brilliant green light, and leading from it down the side of the rock, across the cavern floor, and disappearing between the stone columns in the blackness, was a row of shining green arrows!

Itza cried out with delight and clapped her hands at my surprise and her own triumph. Hadn't she said so? Hadn't she known Nohul Voh had spoken the truth? We hurried on, following the arrows. Suddenly I burst into a peal of laughter. It all seemed so

ridiculously familiar—"Follow the green arrows"—I could almost imagine myself in the subway at Times Square, in New York, glancing at the green line as I hurried towards the Lexington Avenue trains! But of course I couldn't explain this to Itza, and she glanced apprehensively at me wondering if I had suddenly lost my senses.

AS we followed the arrows and the symbols that appeared from time to time, I realized how little chance we would have had, had we tried to find the entrance by moving in a direct line across the cavern. The marks turned, twisted, ziz-zagged; swung to left, to right; doubled. I lost all sense of direction, but at last, far ahead, a patch of light showed in the blackness, and a moment later we stood at the entrance. Nothing had changed. The stones and the log I had placed there months before were still in position, and, passing through the opening beneath the idol, we stood once more in the blessed sunshine in the fair, green valley.

I looked up at the great image leaning far forward as if about to fall upon its knees. A question was in my mind. Should I leave the entrance open, so that any man who passed that way might enter and find Mictolan, so those within the valley might have free egress in case they ever deserted Mictolan? Or should I remove the props, swing the idol back in place and close the entrance?

Visions of Mictolan, of the peaceful happy life of its people rose before me. I saw Azcopil ruling the people wisely and well, I saw the lofty temples, heard the pealing of the great bell. Then I visualized the valley overrun with strangers, exploited by rough, unprincipled miners, the Mayas degraded, oppressed, debauched with the rum and vices of the white man. Better by far that they should always remain in their hidden valley, that Mictolan should remain forever unknown, inaccessible to the rest of the world.

Cautiously I removed the wedges and the logs. Carefully I clamored up the mighty image, studying it, examining it, testing it, until at last I found the secret of its mechanism and slowly, smoothly, with a slight jar it swung into place, sealing the entrance to the Cavern of the Bats.

There was little difficulty in finding the symbol on the rock beside the stream. My memory of that mysterious vision in the house of Nohul Voh was very vivid. I recognized every landmark I had seen in that mystic smoke. The rushing brook was exactly as I had seen it. There was the placid shaded pool, and even before we saw the sculptured symbol, I felt sure it would be there, cut deeply into the water-worn surface of the ledge. Beside the pool we decided to rest for the afternoon and night. My nerves were still a bit shaky, and I knew that Itza, unaccustomed to long walks with a pack upon her shoulders, was tired, although she would not admit it. She was so delighted with everything, that I doubt if she knew whether she was tired or not.

Even this first glimpse of the outside world was fascinatingly strange to her. The verdure, the rolling green hills, the distant hazy-blue mountains, the dense jungle, all were different from anything in her native valley. She insisted on bathing in the clear calm pool. It was an inviting-looking spot with its crystal water, its bottom of white and red pebbles, its little crescent of sandy beach. I longed for a swim myself and, having assured myself that there were no alligators or other dangerous inhabitants in the pool, we plunged in, and for an hour or more dove, swam, frolicked, splashed and had a glorious time. Refreshed, and with keen appetites, we emerged at last. I was anxious to conserve our slender stock of food for emergencies that might arise, and I felt certain that there were fish in the stream. So, while Itza dried herself—like the golden statue of a Dryad—in the sunshine, I tried my luck with my hand-made hooks and line. No skill was needed to capture the denizens of that brook, they seemed anxious to be caught, and in almost as many minutes I had half a dozen beauties flapping on the grass. We dined royally and, having rested and smoked, I busied myself rigging up a palm-leaf shelter for the night.

As we were doing this—for Itza was more expert at such matters than I was—she touched my arm and pointed silently to where an unsuspicious deer had stepped from the jungle and stood looking at us curiously. That night we dined on broiled venison, and spent the evening "haricotting" the rest of the meat over a smoky fire. We now had plenty of food to last us for several days, even if no other game was obtainable and I had no further fear of going hungry for some time to come. The sun was just topping the mountains when we set off the next morning, following the course of the stream, happy and light-hearted. By noonday, when we stopped again to rest and eat, the brook had widened to a fair-sized river and, remembering the vision or whatever it was, that I had seen in the sorcerer's smoke, I looked about for material with which to construct a raft or boat of some sort.

Then for the first time, I realized that I was unconsciously assuming that I actually *had* looked into the future, or at least had, by some mysterious means, been enabled to view the route we were following. Nonsense! I said to myself. How could I have seen a place I had never visited? By some form of hypnosis or auto-suggestion Nohul Voh might have caused me to *think* I saw the valley near the cliff with the great idol. I *had* seen that before. But I had surely never been here by this broad stream. Yet there was the symbol on the rock by the pool. There was the stream. Try as I might to argue against it, I felt in my heart and innermost mind that everything would eventuate precisely as I had seemed to see it back in Mictolan. And at any rate, it would be far easier and quicker to travel down river by boat or raft than to follow the winding course of the stream afoot.

In the tropics, it is usually a simple matter to make some sort of a craft that is buoyant, easily handled and capable of supporting considerable weight in fairly calm water. There are always bamboos or the cork-like Balsa trees within easy reach when in jungle country, and where there are lakes or back-waters, there are the hollow reeds that, tied into bundles and lashed together, may be used to construct those light, seaworthy but strange crafts known as "balsas" by the Indians, who use them exclusively to navigate the waters of Lake Titicaca. And here, close to the stream, were bamboos, cork-like balsa* trees and plenty of reeds. Itza fell to with a will and worked like a beaver. Her endurance and strength always surprised me. She did not give the impression of being a particularly strong woman, but the soft curves and contours of her body and limbs covered muscles that were almost equal to my own, and she possessed the remarkable endurance of her race. And when it came to performing any task that called for primitive methods or native skill, she was immeasurably superior to me, despite the fact that I always prided myself upon my knowledge and experience of woodcraft.

With her help we soon had several good-sized balsa logs ready, and by sundown we had practically finished a sort of combination raft and catamaran that would, I felt sure, serve us on the stream as long as we did not meet rapids or falls. The next morning we embarked,

*A tropical wood of extreme lightness.

and thereafter, for days, we drifted swiftly, easily, down river without adventure, without effort.

TWICE, as we swept past cliffs, we saw the symbols pointing ever onward, and despite myself I was forced to admit that, regardless of how it had been done, old Nohul Voh had revealed the truth to me when he had showed me the "Way of the Symbols." So, being now convinced that it was so, I kept a sharp lookout for the precipice in whose base was the black tunnel through which the river flowed in the vision. Each day, as we drifted on, the mountains receded and became lower. Each day the river broadened, and I was constantly expecting to see Indian huts or villages and was as constantly surprised to find the country apparently uninhabited. Game was abundant, the stream was filled with fish, and though Itza missed the vegetable food to which she had always been accustomed, still she made no complaint and remained well and strong.

Often she laughingly twitted me on having pictured such bugbears of dangers and hardships. Since leaving the Cave of the Bats it had all been easy, safe, glorious fun to her. But we were not at the end of our journey yet, I told her.

Then, at last, one day we saw the expected mountain side stretching across the valley ahead, and presently, as we drew near, the black archway at its base was visible, exactly as I had seen it in my vision. By now I had become so thoroughly convinced of the accuracy of that glimpse into the unknown, that I felt perfectly sure that we would pass through the tunnel and emerge on the farther side in safety. But unfortunately the smoke-screen had not shown me the craft in which I was voyaging. Still, our balsa wood raft had proved most efficient, there was no sign of rapids or falls ahead —although the current increased and ran swiftly into the tunnel. But I was not taking any unnecessary chances. Running the raft ashore, I made it fast, and, with no little difficulty, made my way down stream until within a few feet of the opening in the cliff. But though we both listened intently, we could hear nothing that sounded like rapids or a fall—just a low, rushing, steady roar. Only one peril, I felt, remained. Could I feel sure that there was space enough between the surface of the stream and the roof of the tunnel for our craft and ourselves to pass? Fully ten feet of space showed at the entrance, but could I be certain it did not decrease within?

Then I noticed that the high water-mark—the highest point reached by the river in the rainy season—was not within four feet of the top of the opening. That settled it. The tunnel must be large enough to permit the whole volume of the river in the wet season to pass without backing up, and it was now the height of the dry season. Moreover, hadn't I seen myself floating safely on the lake at the farther end of the tunnel? I cast all doubts and fears aside, overhauled the raft, added lashings, strengthened it, and having lit two torches, we embarked, cast the raft free and were swept into the black hole. It was a strange weird scene with our torches casting a ruddy glare upon the swirling waters and the damp rocky walls. But within five minutes the walls vanished. No sign of rock could be seen to right, left or overhead, and I laughed aloud at my misgivings. Instead of becoming lower, the tunnel had opened into a vast cavern—vast indeed as I knew from the echo of my laughter. And it was not long. We seemed hardly to have entered the place—the arch was still outlined against the sunshine behind—when ahead we saw the glimmer of light. It increased rapidly in size, and more quickly than it takes to tell it, we swept out from the cavern and rocked gently upon the surface of a good-sized lake. As if I had known the place all my life, I turned instinctively and peered at a rocky islet a few hundred feet distant. Though I had expected it, yet, when I saw the familiar symbol cut into the rock, I uttered a surprised ejaculation, and a peculiar sensation—as I imagine one might feel who sees or *thinks* he see a ghost—caused a tingling of my spine. But Itza's eyes were sharper, quicker than mine.

"Look, look, Itzimin mine!" she cried excitedly. "Houses! People!"

I shaded my eyes and stared incredulously. But there was no doubt of it. Less than half a mile distant a village stood at the edge of the lake, and people were moving back and forth upon the beach.

That they would be Indians was certain. But would they prove hostile or friendly? However, there was nothing we could do. The natives had already seen us and several canoes were coming swiftly towards us. As they drew near, I was relieved to see that they wore hats, that they were dressed in coarse native cotton shirts and—yes, there was no doubt about it—one fellow had on a pair of pants!

That settled it. I had no further fears. In fact, as the Indians drew near they were far more afraid of us than we had been of them. I shouted to them in Zutugil, but that appeared only to scare them the more. Then I tried Spanish, and with shouts of delight they replied in the same tongue. They were friendly, half-civilized, simple, harmless people, and ten minutes later we were in the village, objects of the most intense curiosity on the part of the villagers. But when, by chance, they caught a glimpse of the tattooed symbol on my chest, their curiosity changed instantly to wonder and adoration. They might be Spanish-speaking, degenerate, semi-Christianized, half-civilized members of their race, but they still recognized the mark of the ancient Mayan priest-kings and revered those who bore it. At this juncture, Itza bent towards me and whispered a question that brought roars of laughter from my lips.

"Are these people of your race, Itzimin?" she asked.

To me there was something extremely ludicrous in her query, in her mistaking members of her own race for Anglo Saxons. But after all, why not? They were no more like the people of Mictolan than—well, I was about to say than like me, but honestly, of the two, I verily believe that, being a civilized man "gone native" as one might say, I looked far more like their kinsman than any man in Mictolan.

For a moment Itza looked hurt at my merriment over her quite natural and innocent question, but when I had explained, she regarded it as a good joke and laughed gaily herself. And as the Indians felt that there must be something funny, and that it would be discourtesy to their distinguished guest not to show appreciation of it, they, too, burst into peals and roars of laughter.

THEY were good-natured, simple folk, and in reply to my questions, informed me there was a white man in a village three days' walk to the south. He was, they added, a Padre, though why I, a member of the exalted, almost sacred Titul Zius clan, should want to find a white man or civilization was quite incomprehensible to them. That I was within three days of a village where there was a priest was not so surprising to me as it might seem. It is a remote Indian village indeed that is too far away to have its Padre, and that we had come far and deviously from the valley of Mictolan I knew. The hidden city might be two hundred, three hundred miles distant, and in that wilderness of unexplored mountain ranges such a place as Mictolan might well remain hidden forever, even though within one hundred miles of settlements and even of railways.

"And how is this village called, wherein dwells the Padre?" I asked my informant, who appeared to be the Cacique of the village by the lake.

"It is called the village of Xibaltango, my lord." he replied.

I gasped, speechless with surprise. Xibaltango within three days' march of where I sat! Jolly, good-hearted, roly-poly old Padre José barely sixty miles distant! I could scarcely believe my ears. But very possibly there was more than one Xibaltango.

"And know you not how he calls himself, the Padre?" I queried.

"Of a truth, most certainly, my lord," declared the Indian. "All the world knows that; all know him as the Padre José."

There was no doubt about it. By some whim of fate, of chance or of Providence the 'Way of the Symbol' had led us to—well, relatively speaking, to the front door of Padre José.

Three days later we stood before him, and the amazed, incredulous, utterly flabbergasted expression that came over his ruddy jovial face when he recognized me, is beyond words to describe.

"Santisima Madre!" he cried, devoutly crossing himself at his involuntary exclamation. "It is the Señor Americano! It is the Señor who had the codex and who went to Katchilcan! But, Señor, it is impossible, it is a miracle, it is an apparition! He—the Señor—you, were killed, destroyed, murdered by the Indios Bravos! I had word from Katchilcan—your—his—the Señor's bearers returned with the tale. I have said masses, prayers; have burned candles for the repose of your—the Señor Americano's soul. I have done penance for having sent you—him—into the wilderness.

Dios mio, it cannot be so, Señor, it is not—tell me it *is* true!"

I assured him that it was true, that I was very much alive, that I had never been killed.

He heaved an immense sigh of vast relief. Then, with a twinkle in his eye. "And the Senorita, Señor? Is she—the pretty one—also real or is she perhaps an apparition?"

"She, also, is most real *mi* Padre," I assured him. "It is a long, long story and greatly, I know, it will interest and amaze you. But first of all, would I ask that you convince yourself that we are both of flesh and blood by making us man and wife."

He pursed his lips and whistled. Placing the tips of his pudgy fingers together, cocking his head first on one side and then the other, he surveyed us critically. Then he burst out laughing.

"Señor Americano!" he exclaimed. "Many, very many and very strange things have I heard of you *Norte-Americanos*. Much that I could not believe; but the very strangest, the most incredible of all is what I hear from your own lips. You come to me with a so-strange codex. I send you to learn the Zutugil. From there you journey to see Katchilcan. He tells you some story, you vanish in the wilderness. You are killed, destroyed. I pray for the repose of your soul—though for all I know you are heretic—the months pass. Suddenly, from nowhere, a spirit, a ghost, an apparition, you appear. You have been transformed; no longer are you the *Señor Americano*. You are, you have become a savage, an Indio, and—*Madre de Dios*, yes, *si*, an ancient Maya—a figure from that so-strange codex. By your hand you lead a girl, an India, a most beautiful *muchacha*. An India such as I, who thought I knew all the tribes, have never seen. Do you tell me where you have been, Señor? Do you relate your tale? Do you explain why you still live? Do you speak of your codex? No, no indeed! Your first words are—'Marry me to this maiden!' It is sublime, marvelous! If I had doubts before, I could have none now. Never—not for one moment! No one but an Americano, a Yanqui could be so mad! But I am impatient to hear your story. I am aflame with curiosity. So I *will* marry you, will baptize you, will make you both *Catolicos* so I may do so. Only in that way can I get the story, Señor. That I can see. But," he added as if to himself, "very much do I doubt if in the eyes of God you will be any more man and wife than you are now."

To Itza that extemporaneous baptism, the short ceremony that made us legally man and wife, was all a most impressive, mysterious and wonderful affair.

Aside from myself, Padre José was the only white man she had ever seen, and having never seen me save bearded, unkempt, tanned, the fat, jolly, smooth-faced priest appeared like a being of a totally different race. To her, too, the little adobe church must have appeared a most poor and tawdry "temple." And though, for her benefit, Padre José used the Zutugil dialect in the ceremony, she went through it as though in a daze or a dream, and I doubt if she really understood what it all meant or what it was about. In fact, much later, she confided to me that at the time she thought it some mystic rite that all my race went through when they returned from distant places, and that the ring—that the priest produced from the Lord only knows where—was placed upon her finger as a mark to show she was my property. But there was one thing she *did* understand. She recognized the cross above the little altar, she realized that the figure of the Saviour was an image of my people's God. Falling upon her knees before it, she murmured the Lord's prayer I had taught her, and then, switching to her own tongue, gave thanks to Kukulcan.

Greatly touched was the jolly Padre at this, though he placed his hand over his mouth and his merry eyes crinkled at the corners when—like the little heathen she was—she addressed herself to Kukulcan.

SO we came to the end of our wanderings. Pages I might write describing Itza's wonder at all she saw, at the people, the cities, the railways, the steamships, the motor cars—at everything. But all that is apart from the story.

By the time we were back in New York Itza, ever adaptable and quick to learn—was, outwardly, as much the product of twentieth century civilization and fashions as any of the thousands of women upon the streets and avenues of the metropolis. In a city where all the races of the world mingle, her glowing golden skin and lustrous hair attracted no attention, but many an admiring and envious glance was cast at her unusual features, her wonderful eyes and her superb figure. But the great cities had no more charms for her than for myself. They amazed, astounded and terrified her. She longed for sunshine, verdure, mountains and quiet; the surroundings, the home, I had so often dreamed of. And at last, thanks to the codex that had by merest accident come into my hands in far off Vigo, and that had led me through such strange adventures, I found myself in a position to make those dreams come true. No wonder old Katchilcan had said he would give the half of his life to possess the Book of Kukulcan. How true had proved his words as I recalled them: To him who has the Book, and comes by it by honest means, his way shall be made easy and he shall gain great peace and happiness, and he shall abide forevermore with the gods."

And as I prepare to lay aside my pen, and Itza rises and with smiling lips and eyes comes towards me, I know that, for me, at least, the promise of the ancient prophecy has been borne out in full—beyond even my wildest expectations.

Epilogue

SINCE writing the above story of my adventures and experiences in the city of Mictolan, I have read it to Itza. "Why!" she exclaimed, "You have left out some of the most important facts. You haven't explained about the Bridge of Light or Nohul Voh's tube or the light in his house. And after all the trouble and time you and your friends have devoted to studying them!"

To my surprise, I discovered she was right. I *had* mentioned the ideas and theories I had formed in Mictolan, but these, I had later found, were not entirely correct. Fortunately I had preserved the bamboo tube, and my friend Dr. Farrabee had written a special treatise on it. Its contents were, he found, an entirely new element related to radium but possessing several unique properties. Thus, while lead is (to all intents and purposes) a radium insulator, it offers no resistance to the rays of this new element that Dr. Farrabee has named Nohulite at my request. But remarkably enough, any cellulose tissue or fibre completely isolates Nohulite. As is well known, radium destroys organic tissue and affects bone. But Nohulite appears to have no effect upon bone itself, though it destroys animal fat almost instantly. Its most remarkable property, however, is that in the presence of metals it discharges rays or electrons in inconceivable quantities without appreciable loss of energy or bulk to itself. Although this discharge, this fusillade, if I may use the term, is quite invisible to the human eye, yet the instant it comes into contact with a metallic element it produces an intense heat and a colored glow, the amount of heat and the color of the glow depending upon the metal and its purity. This phenomenon, according to Dr. Farrabee's exhaustive monograph, is due to resistance. In other words, just as current of electricity passing through a resistant material, such as iron, will cause that material to become incandescent, so the discharge of electronic energy from Nohulite, striking a resistant material, produces heat and an incandescent glow. But contrary to what one would expect, the purer the metal the greater the resistance. Hence, when, in the passages of the temple, I turned the ray upon the rocks, a red glow—due to the presence of iron—resulted with comparatively little heat. But when it was turned upon gold—or pure copper—a tremendous amount of heat was generated instantly. Even the mysterious and seemingly inexplicable manner in which the rays had revealed the otherwise green arrows in the Cave of the Bats has been explained by Dr. Farrabee's experiments. Chromium oxides glow brilliant green under the rays, and no doubt the arrows were either cut into the rock, and filled with chrome—which would be indistinguishable by the naked eye from the rest of the stone—or they had been painted with some chromium oxide upon the rocks. Even if they were completely covered with a thin layer of limestone—as they probably were—they would still be revealed by the ray of Nohulite.

Unfortunately I brought back no samples of the other materials I had seen in the valley, and there were only my observations and descriptions of the various phenomena to aid in formulating theories and hypotheses. I had assumed that the Bridge of Light was a jet of vapor or gas ionized by contact with radium or some radioactive mineral. But neither Dr. Farrabee, Professor Le Conte nor Sir William Lille agree with me. They are unanimous in declaring that, in their opinions, the vapor was in itself sufficiently solid to support the weight of human beings. At first this sounds incredible, for we invariably think of vapors or gases as thin, fluid and incapable of supporting solid objects. But it must be borne in mind that the terms "fluid" and "solid" are relative only. In comparison with air or helium gas, water is a "solid." In comparison with water, mercury is a "solid." Air will not support wood, but water will; water will not support iron, but mercury will. Conversely, compared to iron, mercury is liquid; compared to wood, water is a liquid. And whether or not any material—so-called fluid or liquid—will support a given object depends entirely upon the relative weight—per cubic inch—of the two. Hence, if we can imagine a gas or vapor weighing more per cubic inch than a human body, that gas would support a man. And there is no scientific or other reason why there should not be gases heavy enough to do so; why there should not be gases as much heavier than water as helium or hydrogen gas is lighter than water. That the Bridge of Light glowed in various colors was perhaps (these eminent scientists admit) caused by radioactive minerals. In fact, such a stream of vapor, undoubtedly containing metallic elements or particles, if passing through rock containing Nohulite, would almost certainly glow with the various colors of the metallic elements produced by the Nohulite rays. Also, the scientists I have mentioned, as well as Professor Nordstrom, the world renowned authority on rare earths, seem to be fairly well convinced that Nohul Voh's light (as well as the various other lights of Mictolan) was produced by a use of the same remarkable Nohulite. Dr. Farrabee's experiments, as I have said, have proved that each metal, and metallic salt or solution, produces a distinct color under the Nohulite action. But so far he has been unable to find a single known metal that reacts with a white glow. The nearest he has come to this is by the use of a mixture of thorium and potassium. This gives a very brilliant but soft yellow light. Indeed, if any considerable quantity of Nohulite were available, had I in fact brought out a few hundred pounds of the material, I would have been a multi-millionaire, and the artificial lighting systems of the world would have been revolutionized. So remarkable are the properties of the mineral, so insignificant its loss of energy that, ever since I have returned from Mictolan—and Dr. Farrabee completed his studies—a period of more than two years, his home and my home have been illuminated from top to bottom with Nohulite lamps. Each contains less than one-tenth of a gram of Nohulite, and each produces light of practically one hundred candlepower. And yet, so far, no diminution can be detected either in amount of light or the quantity of Nohulite.

Finally there is the strange, ever-rotating green sphere that so puzzled me in Nohul Voh's room. But no scientist has yet been able to formulate a more satisfactory or more reasonable theory to explain it than that which I decided upon myself.

There is one more paragraph I must add. I have hesitated hitherto to write this story of Mictolan. I realized that to do so would be to attract the attention of promoters, speculators, exploiters. And I realized that even if I had closed the entrance to the Cave of the Bats, even if the Bridge of Light never again spanned the chasm, even if I refused to divulge the exact location of the valley, it would be found as soon as the world learned of the riches of the place. An airplane could locate it easily; no matter how inaccessible it might be overland, airplanes could land in the valley. And for the same reason I had pledged my scientific friends to absolute secrecy regarding the origin of the priceless Nohulite.

But now all is changed. Mictolan, I feel sure, has forever vanished from the face of the world. Soon after the terrific and disastrous earthquakes that shook Guatemala four months ago, a government airplane, carrying relief to one of the stricken cities, reported passing over an immense lake filling what was apparently the crater of an enormous extinct volcano. The lake, so the observer reported, showed indications of having recently been formed. Dead and uprooted trees still floated upon its surface and, projecting a few feet above the surface of the water were the summits of two ancient Mayan temples. In every detail the description and the location of the lake coincide with Mictolan, and I am absolutely convinced that Mictolan, with all its people, was completely destroyed, completely submerged by the great cataclysm of nature.

THE END

Euthanasia Limited

By David H. Keller, M. D.

Author of "The Revolt of the Pedestrians," "The Yeast Men," etc.

Illustrated by WESSO

A LITTLE white-haired woman was working in her laboratory.

In spite of the fact that the room was filled to overflowing with a multitude of electro-scientific instruments, there was order and method in their arrangement and the entire atmosphere was one of exquisite cleanliness. Anna Van Why was, without doubt, an ultra-modern scientist, but there were certain inherited characteristics in her nature which it was impossible for her to escape from. Thus she combined the modern with the past. While she smoked, the ashes and the odor were instantly removed from the room by a vacuum ash receiver, a little invention of her own.

She had arranged the halves of apples in series, thus forming a vegetable battery which produced a potential of over one volt. She smiled to herself as she realized that she was the first human being who had ever approached the problem of life in that way. Before that morning millions of persons realized in a dim way that vegetation had life. She alone thought of the possibility of connecting that life with death.

Even as she was carefully measuring and recording the amount of electric potential formed by these segmented apples, her half brother came into the room. Between the two was a peculiar bond that was both negative and positive in its potentiality. They admired each other in some ways, detested each other in some ways, but always there was the strong tie of mutual scientific interest in all of the unanswered questions that Nature has put to puzzled man.

"The apple is alive, John," she said, as she looked up and saw who her visitor was. "I arrange them in certain sequence, connect them with fine copper wire and obtain over a volt of electrical potential. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Nothing new. We have all known for years that electric potential was a common property of nearly all living matter. Some fishes are veritable batteries, capable of discharging such an amount of electricity that men are disabled and often die in the water before they recover the use of their muscles. Plants have potential electricity; animals have. Did you ever rub a cat's hair in the dark? I never thought of an apple, but there is nothing new in it now that I do think of it. It is simply saying an old sentence with new inflection. Nothing to be excited about, is it?"

The white-haired woman smiled.

"There are two reasons why you are not interested in my apple battery, and both are very interesting. In the first place you see nothing commercial in it. You

¶ Considerable work has been done in obtaining an electric current from vegetable matter, such as apples or potatoes. In a book entitled "Plant Response," Bosé offers conclusive proof that plants do have life and possess electric current. What further use might some day be made of plants in experimenting with life is hard to say. What is life? And what constitutes death? Dr. Keller introduces some ingenious and original ideas on this subject and some suggestions on the subject of Euthanasia, which means "beautiful death." This story is more than scientifically interesting. It possesses true literary value too and is well worth reading and re-reading to get the full significance of the ideas advanced.

She had arranged the halves of apples in series, thus forming a vegetable battery which produced a potential of over one volt

cannot visualize some new kind of stock promotion to fool your gullible public. The second reason is that it is a part of my search for the real cause and meaning of death. You are too active, too much alive, to be interested in death. It means nothing to you. You only think of it to avoid thinking of it. Am I right?"

The well-dressed man laughed.

"Absolutely, Sister Anna. Life is too sweet for me to spend it thinking about the problems of death, and a man has to have money in order to spend it and he has to spend it in order to have any comfort out of life. So your apple battery does not interest me. Go on with your vegetable investigation. I brought a copy of *Vogue* with me, and while you work with apples I will read about the peaches of society and later on we will go to dinner and I will spend on you some of the money I make out of that gullible public you would so like to protect from my ravages."

He had hardly started to read when another visitor came. He was a noted scientist from Edinburgh, and had come across the Atlantic for no other purpose than to see the celebrated electro-biologist, A. Van Why. He was more than surprised to find that she was a woman, for in her publications she had carefully concealed not only all personalities but even her own sex. So they both were surprised—she to think that anyone would be enough interested in her work to make such a journey to see her, and he to find that the scientist he so admired in literature was a little bit of a white-haired woman.

"If you can spare the time," he said, after the formalities of the introduction had been finished, "I wish that you would tell me about your investigations into the real nature of death. I have heard that you are almost alone in some of your ideas and that, if they are shown to be true, you will revolutionize our entire biological thought. Suppose you start with the idea that I am just a rather ordinary scientist—in other words, give me a rudimentary lecture on the subject."

"You underestimate your own importance as a scientist, Sir Lauder," Anna Van Why replied. "No one knows better than I do your remarkable contributions to electrical biology. If I do as you wish me to, it will be more with the idea of politely complying with a request, than to acknowledge any inferiority on your part. However, make yourself comfortable and I will see how elemental I can make the lecture.

"A SECOND after death occurs there is practically no difference in the body. The dead body is practically similar to the living body, just as the charged battery is similar in structure to the discharged battery. Only something has happened which makes us say that the person is dead. For over thirty years I studied this problem of death to see just what phenomena happened that could be held accountable for the change called death. All the peculiar phenomena I found were the result of death, rather than the actual cause of the cessation of life. All my studies in the circulation, respiration, blood chemistry, acid-alkali balance, failed absolutely to reveal the actual cause of death.

"Finally I approached the question from the standpoint of conductivity. I found that, as death approached, the central nervous system decreased while the liver increased in conductivity, and there were, at the same time, the changes one would expect in the electrical capacity of all of the bodily cells. But even here I felt that we were simply observing a fact instead of actually finding a real cause of the cessation of life.

"But I could not give up the idea that in some way electricity was connected with all the changes comprehended under the two words, life and death. There was no value in the study of the varied associates of death, such as hemorrhage, injury, infection, insomnia, anæsthesia, asphyxia, surgical shock, the removal of vital organs. There must be some single factor back of and accompanying these myriads of complicating accessories. I knew what happened in all of them—the living structures, the individual cells, were unable to hold their form, and as a result, the delicate organic molecules lost their ability to hold together and began to disintegrate—I knew this happened. What I wanted to know was why it happened.

"One of the primary rules of biology that I accepted many years ago was that all life was governed by the same rules. In applying this rule to our problem I would simply state that in all living things the reason for life and the cause of death are the same for all. If an apple lives, it lives for the same reason that a man lives. The causes that kill man, also kill apples

"With that rule in mind I again approached the problem of death. I now was able to have an unlimited supply of experimental material, without any opposition from the anti-vivisectionists. They did not care how many apples I used. So I worked with a great many different objects, all of which I thought could be called alive, in the same sense that man was alive. When I did this I satisfied myself that all life, plants, animals, fruits, have a certain electrical potential that can be measured during life, and which drops to zero at death. All that the supposed causes of death did was to decrease this potential. Irrespective of the name—anæsthetics, insomnia, poisons, injuries, freezing, boiling, or a hundred other forms of fatal complications—all that happened in every instance was this change in the potential. There was just one important fact to be considered and that was the difference in the potential of the nervous system compared to the other systems of the body.

"Our work with insomnia was interesting. Perhaps you know the old system of torture used by the Chinese. The prisoner's head is shaved and he is seated on a chair and held there so he cannot move. Above is a pail of water and from that pail a drop falls every minute on his hairless scalp. In a few days he dies. Hour after hour he has remained awake waiting for that drop to fall every minute. In our experiments we have found that insomnia reduces the potential of the nervous system to zero, at which point death occurs. If, however, just before zero is reached, the organism is permitted to rest and sleep, the potential climbs up from zero and the life of the individual is saved.

"The two forms of life that we did the most experimenting with were the apple and the amœba. First let me tell you about the apple. We feel that it is alive. It was not only alive, but it breathed, consuming 3 to 4 cubic centimeters of oxygen every hour. Thus we had a second method of studying the life phenomena of the apple, one being the determination of its electric potential and the other its ability to consume oxygen. We had previously performed experiments on the rabbit and dog with adrenalin and temperature changes. We repeated these experiments on the apple and obtained identical results. For example we could anæsthetize the apple, producing first a rise in the potential and an increased metabolism and then a continual fall to a zero point, where we had no potential and an absolute cessation in respiration. When the potential reached zero, the apple rapidly began to disintegrate—in other words, to rot.

"We invented a little apparatus to measure the potential of the apple. In perfect health this was about fifty millivolts. The idea of fruits inspired me to see if I could make a battery and this combination of half apples and wire on my table is the result. From it I obtained a potential of over one volt.

"With these facts in my possession I told my students that we were prepared to continue the same experiments with a form of life that we felt was really ancestral, the one-celled amœba. One of my girls, a tireless worker with the microscope, finally perfected an electrode so fine that it could actually be inserted into the living amœba as it lay under the microscope. We were now able to do three things. One was to measure the potential as we had the apple and all other forms of life, the second was the ability to withdraw the electric force from the amœba and the third the ability to charge the amœba with electricity. In other words, we were able to measure, decrease and increase the potential and all under the keen eye of the observer at the microscope. We performed most of these experiments with the Amœba Pelomyxa, a large type that often attains a diameter of one-sixteenth of an inch

"Its potential often reached fifteen millivolts. This potential changed when adrenalin, anæsthetics and sodium iodide were added to the liquid in which the amœba was suspended. We could measure the change in potential under these various conditions by means of the little electrode which we placed inside the body of the one-celled animal. When we increased the potential by electrical means the amœba became active, but when the potential was decreased, the movements became less active and the body came together in a quiet mass. When zero was reached, the amœba disintegrated, first into large and then into smaller granules and finally became actually dissolved in the surrounding liquid. That, we felt, meant real death.

"What did it mean? Simply this. We were able to produce every phenomenon of death simply by reducing the potential to zero. All the other factors, which we have been considering as the causes of death, simply do the same thing, namely, reduce the potential to zero. Therefore we feel that we have at last reached the point where we can say that death is caused by the reduction of the potential to zero.

"But, if at any time before zero is reached, we reverse the current and increase the potential, then the amœba resumes its active stage and continues to live. That, in a few words, Sir Lauder, is the result of our studies of the very interesting phenomena of death. Have you any help for us? Any criticism? Would you like to see an amœba under these circumstances come near death and yet live again? Or would you like to see an apple breathe?"

"This is all very remarkable, Miss Van Why. The most interesting thing to me is that practically every statement you have made has been known to me for some time, but I could never put the facts together so as to enable me to arrive at any logical or valuable conclusion. You have the divine touch that makes the dry bones of science alive and vital. I have an idea that your lecture can be commercialized. As I understand it, all of your fruit is brought enormous distances in iced cars. No doubt the expense is great. Yet in the constantly revolving wheels under the cars you have a potential source of electricity. Why not let me make a little invention, so that these fruit cars can be constantly charged with electricity generated by the revolving wheels in contact with brushes and thus, as the potential of the fruit is constantly maintained, it will reach the consumer in a perfectly healthy condition. If you have no objection, I will patent this idea and see if I cannot sell it to the parties most interested. I will make you a fifty-fifty partner. What say?"

The little biologist laughed.

"I have always heard that you Scots were canny and apt to pinch the penny. You come here to learn about death and almost before I finish, you see the way of adding to your fortune. Go ahead and success to you. Money does not mean anything to me, except to give me additional resources to finance my experiments. I notice that my little laboratory girls like it; they rave over every increase I am able to give them. Suppose you have dinner with my brother and me. We might be able to increase our potential, if we put some steak into our gastro-intestinal tract."

DURING the entire lecture, John Van Why had apparently continued to read his copy of *Vogue*. In reality he had paid the closest attention to every word his sister had said. He had not only listened, but there had been some very rapid and intensive thinking. However, he was a charming companion at the dinner table and in every way confirmed the oft-repeated statement of his sister, "that when John wanted to be nice, he could be very nice, indeed."

The next week John Van Why was a constant visitor at his sister's laboratory. There was a great attempt on his part to learn all there was to learn about the potential of the amœba and apple. His studious attention pleased and worried his sister. The year before, a week of such activity had been followed by a prolonged debauch, and Anna Van Why was too keen a psychologist not to realize that in certain respects the behavior of her brother was, to say the least, abnormal.

Finally he had mastered the delicate technique of every experiment. He had studied the amœba and exhausted the possibilities of the apple. Even a few rabbits, a dog, and a calf had succumbed to his scientific zeal. Then his enthusiasm died down; he ceased to work hours every day, and to all appearances resumed his former indolent habits. But he did not get drunk. His sister was more amazed than ever. Had she known what was really back of all his efforts to learn her technique, she would have been more than surprised.

JOHN VAN WHY belonged to the Paint and Powder Club, one of the most exclusive and peculiar clubs in New York City. It was seclusive as well as exclusive, but at the same time there was an interesting bond among the members. It was not a bond of extreme sociability, either. Two interesting stories were told, which illustrated the exclusiveness of the membership and their relations to each other. The oldest member gave a dinner in honor of the youngest member. When asked why he had done so, he replied that he had been a member of this club for over fifty years and this young man had been the first member to offer him a cigarette. The other story tells of an old member who had gone into the reading room and died there. He was dead for three days before anyone knew it, because of an unwritten law which forbade anyone from speaking to, or in any other way disturbing the meditations of, a member in this room. No doubt both stories were greatly exaggerated, but they were often repeated and much enjoyed by the entire membership.

Back of the eminent respectability of the club was a sinister shadow. It was a prerequisite that each member be in some way a criminal, a deliberate law violator. But he must be clever enough to preclude any possibility of ever being caught.

At the time John Van Why became interested in the potential of amœba, a large majority of the membership of the Paint and Powder Club were bootleg specialists. In other words, they were specialists in the sale of every commodity whose sale was forbidden either by state or national law. Alcoholic beverages of every kind, narcotics, erotica in literature and dainty femininity, all provided the club members a reason for belonging to the club that specialized in providing society methods for enjoying themselves. John Van Why was considered one of the most brilliant members of the organization; his peculiar gifts as a biological chemist enabled him to support himself in more than one twisted method. And this was the peculiar bond between the membership, namely, the fact that every one of them should have been behind the bars and, while each one knew enough about the others to put them all there, up to the present time not one had ever been sentenced, for a part of the solemn obligation of membership was a sacred promise to commit suicide if the coils of the law ever threatened undue publicity and exposure of any particular member.

It had been over six months since Van Why had thought of anything new in the way of bootleg industry. His fellow members chided him with the fact and accused him of growing old. It was therefore with a feeling of keen enjoyment that he entered the club one evening and asked a few of his special companions in

fashionable crime to join him in one of the private card rooms. While the room was well protected against eavesdroppers, still Van Why was careful to talk in a low voice.

"How about forming a new company, gentlemen? There are five of us. Would you care to put in twenty thousand each?"

The general answer was favorable, provided the company would pay.

"I am sure it will pay," Van Why assured them. "Do you think that I would invest that much if I didn't see several hundred per cent return in the next year? Of course I won't give you the details. Some of you would not understand them if I did, but here are the simple facts——"

He talked for over two hours and at the end of that time the company was formed. It was decided that the stock should be paid for in cash at once and that every member of the company should start at once as a salesman.

"And if you work it right," said Van Why, "we will have plenty of business."

IT was exactly a year later that Anna Van Why had an interesting caller. He was none other than the Chief of the Secret Service of the City of New York. This department was so operated that only a few knew of its existence, and no one except the Governor and the Mayor of the city knew who was at the head of it. However, the chief, with a fine sense of human values, made no effort to conceal either his name or his position from the little biological chemist.

"We are in trouble," he said, "and the big part of our worry is that we do not know enough. About eight months ago the first of a peculiar series of deaths occurred in New York. Later on there were a few similar deaths in other of the large cities, but most of them have been in New York. There is something odd about these fatalities, something so mysterious and strange that the best of our physicians and pathologists are absolutely at sea. The fact is that these persons have died without any real cause for doing so. We heard that you knew more about death than almost anyone else, so I decided to come and ask you for help. Will you give it?"

"Certainly. How many cases are under suspicion?"

"Twelve that we have quietly investigated."

"Any complete autopsies?"

"Yes, and one by Bruner. You know, he is the best pathologist in the State. On three cases there was a complete chemical examination to determine the presence of poisons. We found nothing; absolutely nothing."

"In any of these cases was there any reason why the person should want to die?"

"That is hard to answer. Some of the men seemed to have everything to live for. In other cases, there might have been reasons, family trouble, threatening financial failure."

"Did you consider a wave of suicides?"

"Yes, but when a person kills himself he generally leaves some sign. He must use some means which will leave at least a trace of its action."

"That is true. Of course, in the East, the mystics die simply because they want to."

"We are not in the East. These men are Catholics and Methodists, and do not show, either in their lives or education, even the remotest knowledge of any peculiar religious cults."

"A final question. Here are twelve deaths. Is there any one fact that is in any way common to all of them or half of them?"

"Yes, so far they have all been men."

"Anything else?"

The Chief thought a while—

"Perhaps this may interest you. All were over fifty and wealthy."

"Part of it does. When a man reaches that age, he either wants to live or he wants to die. If he is wealthy he wants to live. Death to a wealthy man at that age is very unpleasant."

"Death is always unpleasant."

"I cannot agree with you. At times it comes as one of the greatest blessings man can ask from the gods. Will you do me a favor? Send me one of the best operators you know of; give him funds enough to handle any emergency and let me work on this problem with him. For the time being, forget that there is a problem. But if you ever hear from us, act quickly."

"What kind of a man do you want?"

"A brilliant man, who looks as though he did not know very much."

"Those are hard to find. The poor lookers are usually the poor doing kind. I will see what I can do. Will you send us regular reports?"

"We are not going to send you anything till we are all through."

"That is unusual, Miss Van Why."

The little lady grew cold. "I thought you came here for help? Take it—or leave it."

"I see. How about your charges?"

"Pay your detective. I am a biologist, not a crime-hound."

The Chief laughed. He had to. Then he asked one more question: "Do you belong to the book-a-month club that specializes in detective stories?"

"I do not. I still have enough intelligence to select my own literature."

And that was the end of the interview.

Some weeks later, in fact so much later that Anna Van Why had nearly forgotten the incident, a card was brought to her by her secretary. It had simply one word on it—

TAINE

"Who is he, Elenore?"

"Blest if I know. Just looks like an ordinary, dried up, middle aged man to me. He said that he had an appointment with you."

"If he has, I have forgotten it. Send him in to my private office."

SHE found that the man was indeed very ordinary, middle aged, small and dried up. He was almost as small as she was.

With the ability acquired through long years, she looked the visitor over very carefully for a few seconds before she spoke.

"Well, what is it? This is my busy day," she said.

"My name is Taine, madam."

"I got that from your card. What can I do for you?"

The man simply handed her another card. On it the astonished woman read:

"This is the man you wanted."

"I don't want any man," she exclaimed. She had, for the moment, completely lost sight of the conversation of long ago with the Chief. "What were you to see me about? A position as janitor?"

"I guess I will have to tell you," the man said with a sigh. "I thought probably you would recognize the name, but since you don't, I will have to tell you. Some weeks ago you asked the Chief of the New York Secret Service to send you a detective that was brilliant and at the same time looked like an imbecile. I am the man. Taine from Sir Francis."

Anna Van Why looked almost pink

"It was not as bad as that. I never said anything

about looking feeble-minded. What I wanted was a rather ordinary looking man who was a brilliant detective. I remember it all now. The Chief wanted me to help him on an investigation that had him puzzled. So you are Mr. Taine. I wonder why the Chief sent to California for an operator?"

"Because he could not get the man he wanted any other place."

The biologist began to laugh.

"Excuse my slang but you don't hate yourself very much, do you?"

"Sometimes, but here is the way it is with me and the Chief. Three years ago I was offered that position, and I did not want it, so I recommended another man for it and that man is the present Chief. Naturally he feels under obligations. He used to work under me."

"Just why did you refuse? That is the best position of its kind in America—at least so it seems to me."

"It is a good position, but we have lived in San Francisco for a long time, and my wife has been President of the Ladies' Aid Society in her church for the last twelve years. She just about runs it. She had an idea that if we moved to New York, it would take her a long time to become acquainted in the church—so she says, 'Let's stay here where we are known.' Besides, there are a lot of Chinamen there and I like to work with them."

"I see."

"Let's get started with our work. Just what do you want me to do?"

"Didn't the Chief tell you?"

"Not a word."

"All right. Then we can start from the beginning. There have been a number of mysterious deaths in New York and you are here to find out about them."

"Good. Tell me about them."

Anna Van Why told him all she had learned from the Chief.

As he listened, he looked every bit the dull man that the biologist had asked for. So true was he to the type, that the biologist was annoyed, and ended by saying sharply:

"I trust you have been paying attention."

"Yes, ma'am. I have been listening to you talk; but so far you haven't said anything."

"What do you mean?"

"You have not given me a single point to start with."

"That is your business."

¶ The secretary ordered these to be opened, and out poured twenty-dollar gold pieces

"I see. Now tell me this: Why are you in this game?"

"For years I have studied death. The Chief heard this and came to me."

"And you told him to send a detective to you?"

"Yes."

"What did you want with the detective, Miss Van Why?"

"I thought—it seemed to be a job for a detective—"

Taine smiled.

"I believe you are right."

"Of course I am right."

"Suppose you tell me what you have learned about death."

So she told him about her amœba experiments.

When she finished, he looked more foolish than ever. At last he said: "It all seems very interesting, but how do the amœba feel about it?"

And that was the final straw. She decided that the man must be either a fool or a liar. Surely such a dumb mind could never have qualified for the position of Chief of the Secret Service of a great city like New York. As far as she was concerned, the conversation was ended, but Taine did not seem disposed to go.

"I would like to see one of those amœba," he said.

"I will have my assistant show you some," the biologist said rather curtly. She was beginning to be thoroughly bored with the man. "I am so busy that I have no time to spend with you myself."

TAINE had a thoroughly good time with the assistant. In a few minutes he was chatting with her as though they had known each other for years. And before he left, he learned that a man by the name of Sir Lauder of Edinburgh had once visited the laboratory and had listened to a lecture on the potential of apples. He found out something else.

He went back to see the chief.

"How did you like Miss Van Why?" that worthy asked.

"You ask her how she liked me. She was so impressed by my dumbness that she actually became annoyed with me. However, I am ready to get to work and the next time you hear from me I will have something to tell you. Do me a favor. 'Phone to the little lady and tell her that you had made a mistake; that you were going to use a local man, and that Taine was going back to San Francisco. She will feel happier to know it and I do not want her to bother me in any way. She is very much of a woman and you know they are peculiar in some ways. She will be delighted to know that I was sent back to San Francisco as incompetent. Now suppose we go over the case as far as you have the details."

The two men were closeted for over three hours. At the end of that time Taine left, with the simple request that if he ever called for help, the chief should not waste any time responding.

"Because," said Taine, "when I ask for help, I sure need it."

IT was some months after that talk between the chief and Taine that a young bootlegger of the alcoholic type took John Van Why into one of the private card rooms at the Paint and Powder Club.

"I have a chance to make a killing for every member of the club, John, if you go in on the deal with us."

"Meaning what?" was the disinterested reply.

"Meaning at least a million for all of us."

"Applesauce."

"Not at all—the real thing. I have felt some of the gold. I ought to know."

"Some new kind of graft? Bootleg? Vice? There certainly cannot be anything new. If any outsider came and told us something new, I would be ashamed of our membership."

"I admit that. This is nothing new in a way, but it certainly is new as far as the business side of it is concerned. This old chap can give every one of the boys pointers in his particular line of bootleg. He is a veritable mine of information in regard to all of our specialties."

"What does he want?"

"A chance to put his proposition before us. Says he will make us all millionaires if we listen to him."

"Why didn't you listen?"

"He wouldn't talk. Said he wants to entertain the membership at a banquet, at which time he will give us his entire program."

"Well, suppose we all go?"

"That is not the point. He wants to entertain us in the club."

Van Why frowned.

"That's different. You know the rules. No one not a member can pass the front door."

"I know that, but you are Chairman of the Rules Committee. You can secure the necessary permission."

"Is that all you want?"

"Absolutely."

"All right. I was afraid you had something else up your sleeve. Go ahead. Tell him to throw the banquet. You are sure you understand him? He's going to give us each a million?"

"Not give it to us—make it possible for us to earn it in a short time."

"That's about the same thing, if the time is short enough. Get word to the members and have them all here. If it is a good thing for one, it is a good thing for all, and you know our obligation. Tell him that as the Chairman of the Rules Committee I ought to have a bonus for letting him in."

"He appreciated that and sent you this piece of jade. Said it was in inferior kind of present, but would you accept it. You need not be bashful. I got one just like it and sold it yesterday for ten thousand."

"You made one mistake, Amerson," said Van Why. "You should have told him I was twins and needed two. You attend to the details and I will see the boys."

TWO weeks later the banquet was given to the thirty-nine members. That was the entire membership. Their boast was that they would be equal to the 40 Thieves of Bagdad just as soon as they found a man bad enough to be worthy of the last place. Naturally, that finishing touch was never given. The thirty-nine members and two Chinese guests made forty-one at the table. They were seated twenty on each side, with the host at the head. He was most wonderfully clad in stiff silken robes, heavy with gold thread and encrusted with jewels. At times he talked in Chinese to the interpreter on his left; at times he was silent; but always he kept his fan slowly moving in his hand. The other Chinaman was in European dress, and in every way appeared to be enjoying the evening.

It was evidently one to be remembered. None of the members of the Paint and Powder Club, not even the most blasé, had ever spent one like it. From the finding of the presents at the table, from the drinking of the first cocktail, to the rendering of the last act of an ultra-Parisian cabaret, no effort was spared to adequately entertain every one of the Nine and Thirty Thieves. And when the end came, the food was cleared away, the servants had departed and the doors were locked; every member was unanimous in the declaration that Ching-Lee or What'sisname was a prince of a good fellow and no mistake would be made in electing him to membership.

THEN the smaller Chinaman stood up and started to talk. He explained that he was private secretary to his master, who was a great man in China. He was not worthy to repeat the thoughts of this great man, but as no one else in the audience could understand the Chinese language, it would be necessary for him to act as interpreter. His master would say a few words and then he would translate them. This would take time, but he was sure that they would be repaid in the end. There might be a little difficulty in putting all of his master's thoughts into fluent English, but they would, no doubt, excuse him for any grammatical blunders.

With this introduction, the Chinaman at the head of the table, without rising, started to talk in his native language. After a few minutes he paused and that much of his speech was repeated in English. After eight pauses he came to a final pause, and this is what he said in those eight parts of his address:

"Most illustrious and wonderful merchants of the Western World. I feel that I am unworthy of eating with you or venturing to address such a noble gathering of upright and successful business men. You will pardon my audacity in presuming to sit with you at the same table. From far away China I have come, learning of your wisdom and success in life.

"It is my hope to begin business dealings with you which will be worthy of your illustrious attention. For some years a group of merchants in China have undertaken, in a small way, the varied business which occupies your time. These merchants have thought it wise to elect me their president. By a spirit of co-operation we have been able to assume control of all this commerce in the East. Last year we did a total business of over two thousand million; in your business circles this would appear small, especially the profits of twenty-three per cent of the gross, but we felt that it was very fair.

"With the hope of increasing this pitiful success, we decided to ask the great men of the West to become our partners and we therefore have in mind a new company, the western office of which will be in New York City. We need more than a few men to join this company, all of them being expert in his particular line of trade. I have therefore suggested to my Board of Directors that we give these men, each one of them, five millions in stock, and in addition a present of one million in gold, if they agree to our proposal. I have the stock certificates downstairs; also the gold. As I felt that some of you would prefer paper, I have a number of millions in United States bonds and large bills. If we can come to terms, I will transfer this to you tonight.

"It is not fair to ask you to join without having a definite idea of our resources. First is our control of the opium and morphine trade. We are soon going to have the entire trade in our hands and have unlimited facilities for placing it in any part of the world. That, with cocaine, forms a large part of our pitifully small business. Then I know that you are interested in alcoholics. My association has the names of over thirty-five thousand of the big bootleggers in the United States. We have each man card-indexed. We know his habits and the extent of his business; we know his customers. If you join us we will promise you that inside of three months all of these thirty-five thousand men will either be dead or fleeing for their lives. Our control of the Tongs in your country makes this promise easy to keep. Once these men are dead, some of you who are specialists in this line will assume charge of this wonderful industry, which your remarkable country has so energetically fostered by your most wise laws.

"No doubt some of you are interested in the fair sex. We control the sale and use of women in the East and there is no reason why we should not, by the same business methods, control it in the western hemisphere. As you know, most of the men engaged in this business are rather timid in their speculations, but with men of intelligence interested, the entire business can be run on an honorable and highly profitable scale.

"Like all of my countrymen, I am interested in fine jewels and precious stones. It is a shame that these are kept from your countrymen by the high tariff. All that will be changed under the direction of our new company and the evasion of unjust taxes will constitute a large part of our profits. This phase of the business of the company will be in the hands of those of you who are best suited by past experience to handle it.

"We will also control the bootleg business in fine books. What a sad commentary on your peerless civilization to think that there are so many books that cannot be bought openly in your shops. I feel that, as far as culture is concerned, we are doing your populace a great favor in making the books, illustrations and art of past and present ages easily available to the collector and lover of this form of art.

"Thus we come to you with gifts in our unworthy hands. We have been able to succeed, but we need your help. We wish to establish the control of euthanasia, which is sadly needed in our own country. No doubt the lives of you glorious sons of the West are so carefree that you need no such word in your vocabulary, but in the East, life at times becomes impossible, especially for our business antagonists. For centuries we have experimented in this form of trade, but feel that all of our methods are ancient and antiquated compared with the brilliant form your wisdom has lately discovered. We bring you everything from the East and only ask that you allow us to take back this wonderful secret to our needy friends."

THUS came the end of the address. The secretary spoke of his own initiative:

"And now, gentlemen, you have heard the master. At each place you will find a little pencil and a little card. If you will sign your name and your specialty and your willingness to become a director in this new company, I will be glad to send for the gold and stock certificates. They are downstairs waiting for your disposal, thirty-nine million in cash and for each man five million in stock. You can form your own company and elect your own officers for the western half of the combine. I assure you that my master is able to keep his promise in every way."

There was a hasty conference, a babble of low whispers, but at the end thirty-nine signed pledges were in the hands of the secretary. He went to the locked door, unlocked it, gave an order to the waiting servant and went back to his seat. Soon five men staggered up, carrying baskets filled with greenbacks and gold coins. The gold coins were in canvas bags, but the secretary opened one of these on the table and out poured twenty dollar gold pieces, like so many marbles out of a sack. He took them by handsful and tossed them over the table.

"Look at them, gentlemen; the genuine article."

"Well, give us our six million," demanded one of the men almost hysterically.

"We will be glad to do so, but first we must know the wonderful secret of your new method of euthanasia."

"What does he mean?" asked a man to his neighbor.

But that man walked around to the back of John Van Wyck's chair.

"You have to tell him, John."

"I am not going to."

"You have got to!"

"I won't!"

The controversy attracted the attention of all. Finally the two Chinamen whispered. Then the secretary arose.

"The condition of this entire agreement," he said, "was that my master take back with him the priceless secret of euthanasia, which was discovered by one of your members. I believe his name is Van Why. It now seems that the gentleman does not wish to contribute this secret toward the good of the new company. Under these circumstances my master feels that the negotiations are at an end, and expresses his profound regret that the new company is impossible. He requests me to have the thirty-nine million carried to a place of safety."

And he started to the door to call the servants. A dozen excited men blocked his path, another dozen surrounded Van Why, imploring him to act in a decent, sensible manner, while others forgot that the dignified Chinaman did not understand a word of English and excitedly told him that he would be given any secret the club possessed.

Amid the confusion, the dignified Oriental never changed his countenance, never lost a stroke of his fan. He gazed on the surging club members as though they were shadow men on the silver screen. He hardly looked interested. Finally John Van Why stood up and called for silence.

"I'll give in," he said. "I had a good thing and I wanted to hold onto it, but I see that it is for our good to listen to this man. So you boys stay here, and I will take the two into my bedroom and tell them about it. Don't touch that gold till I come back. You will kill each other if you decide to try and divide it. Come on, you two men, let's get through with it."

The secretary muttered a few words to his master and then the three left the room. The remaining thirty-eight men looked at each other with anxious drawn faces.

"My word!" exclaimed one of the men. "What did they give us to drink? This has certainly been a night to remember." He suddenly drew his revolver and pointed it at one of the men. "Stop! Hands off that gold. When one gets it, we all do."

Twenty minutes passed and then another twenty and an hour. They were all seated now around the table, smoking. Suddenly the door opened and a group of policemen rushed in.

"Everybody! Hands up!" ordered the plain clothes man at the head of the squad of police.

"What's the charge, Officer," asked one of the calmest of the club.

"Talk to headquarters," was the reply.

"I have always said," was the man's whispered answer, "that they would never get me alive." No one seemed to hear him, but he put a ring in his mouth, bit on it and in thirty seconds was dead. The other men, less brave or more sane, according to the viewpoint, filed sadly out to the waiting wagon. One of the last of them looked pitifully at the baskets of gold and paper money.

"Say, Officer," he begged, "you're not going to let that lie around loose, are you?"

The inspector laughed. "That's all right. Just stage stuff."

AN hour later Anna Van Why was awakened by her telephone.

"This Miss Van Why? This is Police Headquarters. Sorry to tell you your brother John is dead. Yes. Hit by a taxi on Broadway; no signs of injury, but he died at once. Must have suffered a fractured skull. No, he was not drunk. Only an accident. Seems he was trying to get an old lady out of danger and got hit himself. We sent the body to Morgan's Parlors till you decide what to do."

The little white-haired woman stayed awake for the rest of the night. Over and over she said to herself, "I am so glad that he died sober; I am so glad he died sober trying to help the poor old lady; I am so glad—so glad—"

It was not till morning that she started to cry.

The next morning at ten a little insignificant man called at the unmarked office of the Chief of the Secret Service.

"I am through, Chief," said Taine. "I want to report and go back to San Francisco. Wife writes that there is going to be a Church Social of some kind and thinks I ought to be there. You know she is the president of the Ladies' Aid Society and every once in a while she makes me go with her."

The chief smiled. "How often I have heard that line. Forget it and tell me what happened, because I am just about bursting with curiosity. What shall we do with those thirty-seven crooks you had us pinch?"

"Let your judgment be your guide. Here is a signed confession from every one giving his name, his special line of bootleg and his willingness to join some kind of a society for the further promulgation of vice. There is a card here for each man. One man killed himself, but the others were too yellow. I fancy your men will be able to identify most of them and you can handle them as you wish. They had nothing much to do with those peculiar deaths you asked me to investigate. These here men are just extra fish that got into my net."

"But how about the deaths? Have a cigar and begin your story."

"Thanks, but I never smoke. Nicotine hurts the delicate enamel of the teeth and once that goes they soon decay. Ever hear that line before? Well, I will save your life by telling you briefly what I did. Anna Van Why was the key. She knew more than she wanted to know, only she didn't know it. I found out from one of her assistants that the dear old lady had given a lecture on a new cause of death to an Edinburgh man, Sir Lauder, and that at that time the half brother, John Van Why was there. It seems that John was brilliant and bad, while the sister, Anna, was brilliant and good. Same father but different mothers. So I investigated John and found he belonged to the Paint and Powder Club. That was just a name for a den of organized vice of every kind. In your cells you have as sweet a collection of degenerates as was ever collected. No vice without its representatives there, and every one claiming to be a perfect gentleman.

"I found they were all bad and that some of them were poor. So I sprang some parlor theatricals on them and they fell for it. I got Sam Lee, a pretty good Chinaman I know here, but dumb as they make them, to pose as a rich mandarin and I went along as his private secretary. I told Sam I would give him fifty bucks, so you add that to my expense account. Well, I gave them a good strong line and at the end offered to make them millionaires if they would give me the secret of their new form of euthanasia, which means painless death. Of course I was shooting in the dark, but the secret came out. John Van Why had been doing the stunt and they knew it. John didn't want to tell, but the others forced him, so we went to his room. There he sat down and told us that he and three others in the club had formed a company, called EUTHANASIA LIMITED. He furnished the brains and the machinery and the others brought in the trade. He said that there had been sixteen killed so far at twenty-five thousand each. A few of them had made their own arrangements because they were tired of life, but in all the other cases the arrangements for the death had been made by a wife or child to enable the heirs to inherit the property. I do not want to take the time telling you about it, but Anna Van Why had found that every living thing had what she called a potential, a definite amount of elec-

tricity of some kind—and you take this potential from the amœba—that's a kind of bug, Chief—or from an apple, or rabbit or man and they just die. So John, he invents a Morris chair and when the person sits in it, the electrical apparatus in the cushion somehow reduces this potential and he just dies there, in the chair, and the family thinks he died of heart failure or something. Rather cute idea. I told him point blank that I did not believe him, so he says, "Here is one of the chairs, and shows me just how it works. At that, I pull my gun on him and tell him he is under arrest. He is, of course, rather horrified and asks if he can sit down for a few minutes. I never think a thing and tell him to do so, while he is getting his nerve back—and what does he do but sit right down on that chair and turn on all the power and in five minutes he is dead. Died before I realized what was killing him. I sent for the policemen I had stationed at a nearby phone and they pinched the gang. Then I had the undertaker come for John and the other man that swallowed the poison, and then I thought of that poor sister, so I phoned her and told her John was hit by an automobile while he was trying to help a poor old lady, and that he was a brave man and not drunk when he died. That will make her feel better and I gave that story to the press, so of course he is a hero. And there won't be any more mysterious deaths—at least not that kind. Can I go home, Chief?"

The chief looked at the little insignificant man with awe.

"You are a wonder, Taine," he finally said. "You are sure a wonder. What do we owe you?"

"Whatever you think is right. My wife takes ten per cent for her society so the more you give me the better off the church will be. You send me a check. But please don't ever tell Miss Van Why what really happened. She is one nice old lady, even though she did think I was a fool."

That day marked the end, not only of the Paint and Powder Club, but also of Euthanasia Limited.

THE END

"Quarterly" Readers — — —

Don't Miss AMAZING STORIES *Monthly*

"Scientifiction" by World Famous Authors

The Other Side *of the*

ASTRONOMERS seem to be pretty well agreed that the moon is uninhabitable. But even the Lick Observatory telescope, which is the most powerful one of its kind, has naturally enough been able to see only the one side of the moon—the side that is turned to the earth. Only a trip to the moon and around it would disclose what there is on the other side.

Mr. Hamilton can be depended on to furnish an altogether novel way of reaching the moon and makes it seem so logical it seems a wonder some such method hasn't been devised a long time ago.

"The Other Side of the Moon" raises several other interesting questions, among them being, "Who were the first inhabitants of the earth?" So many "obviously" impossible dreams have recently become real achievements, that we can almost begin to read less skeptically about cosmic travel—particularly when it is offered in as plausible a manner as it is in this story.

Illustrated by WESSO

CHAPTER I

The Howland Sensation

IT is only now, in beginning this record of our great adventure, that I realize at last how fragmentary and incomplete such a record must be. For it is only now, looking back upon the thing, that I perceive how much of it remains, and will forever remain, unknown. Even I, Martin Foster, who was one of those to penetrate into the very center of that eon-old menace that gathered out there on our moon's far side, can offer but few explanations of what I experienced and saw. It is because of that, therefore, that this record must remain a purely personal one, from the first.

It was the Howland sensation that was the first of it, to me, that astounding blotting out of Dr. Herman Howland and four fellow-scientists in the interior of Yucatan, which flamed from the newspaper headlines for days. It was a sensation that was intensified at Mid-Western University, where Howland had held the chair of Anthropology, and where I was a humble chemistry-instructor. There were investigations, discussions, rumors, a flurry of general excitement which swept across the campus for weeks. Yet all of this yielded, in the end, no more information really than had the first sensational newspaper accounts. And it is in those accounts that one finds, now, the most clear and comprehensive presentation of the tragic affair's main features.

For several years, as those accounts stated, Dr. Howland had been engrossed in a new theory of anthropological origins which he had formed and which he was endeavoring to prove. It was his belief that a great island-chain had in prehistoric times connected what is now Central America with northwestern Africa, and that it was by way of this chain of islands, of which the West Indies and the Azores were the remnants, that human and animal life had poured into the American continents. To support this theory he had made a number of field-trips to Central America, especially to Yucatan, and had collected a mass of evidence tending to establish that region as the first center of life in this hemisphere. This evidence, consisting of the resemblances of human, animal, plant and even insect life in that region to those of northern Africa, had impressed his fellow-anthropologists in spite of their general hostility to his theory. And it was Howland's contention that a comprehensive scientific survey of the Yucatan region would prove his theory beyond any shadow of doubt.

It was from Mid-Western University that such a survey expedition was finally sent forth, early in April. Dr. Howland, despite his youth, was named as its head, and it included five of his scientific associates whose combined knowledge, it was believed, would enable him to cover the field completely. These were Dr. Erasmus Willings, who held the University's chair of General Biology; Dr. John Borkoff, zoologist; Professor Alexander Grant, internationally-known botanist; Professor William Glitz, entomologist; and young Dr. Richard Carson, geologist, who was a personal friend of Dr. Howland, and of myself. Such an array of scientific talent, it was felt, could not fail to unearth whatever scientific evidence as to the truth of Dr. Howland's theory which could be found, and when the party sailed in April for Yucatan, it seemed certain that it would return with conclusive proof or disproof of that theory.

It was in the latter part of April that news reached us that the party had reached Progreso, on the Yucatan coast, and was preparing for its journey into the little-known interior. The expedition planned, it was stated, to make its way up the winding Carajos River as far as possible by means of native canoes and paddlers, establishing successive camps as it progressed

Moon

By

Edmond Hamilton

Author of "Locked Worlds" and "The Comet Doom"

inward and using these as bases of investigation. This first message from the Howland party was received with great interest at the University, especially by myself and by my fellow chemistry-instructor, Harlan Trent, who, with Howland and Carson, had made up for some time a close quartet of friends. That first message, though, proved the only news we were to receive of the party for some time, since a few days later came word from Howland that the expedition was on the point of starting up the river, which automatically cut off their communication with us and with the world.

Thus Howland and his five associates, with their dozen native paddlers, departed up the Carajos from the village at its mouth, passing up into the dark depths of the tangled Yucatan jungles, which even the natives feared. Three weeks then passed with no word from Howland and his party, weeks in which it could only be guessed that they were pushing on into the interior,

news from the village at the Carajos River's mouth, a short, staggering message. Dr. Richard Carson, that sensational message stated, had been found unconscious, drifting down the Carajos in a single large canoe which was loaded with the dead, shattered bodies of four of his associates, of Willings and Borkoff and Glitz and Grant. Of Howland or the party's natives there was no sign, nor had Carson yet recovered from the complete coma in which he had been found.

THAT bare first announcement of the tragedy catapulted the hitherto unnoticed scientific expedition onto the front pages of the world's newspapers instantly, and struck Mid-Western University and us of its staff with staggering shock. Within ten hours had come a second message that heightened the sensation. The still unconscious Carson and the bodies of his four friends had been removed from the village to Progreso, it was announced, and physicians there had made a careful examination of the four bodies. They stated that those bodies, shattered as they were, had not been crushed in the least from without, but had apparently exploded from within, an *outward* shattering of their bodies that seemed utterly inexplicable. Only some terrific and unpredictable force could ever have shattered them thus, they stated, and so the thing had to be put down, for the time being, as a result of circumstances and forces unknown, which only Carson could explain.

Carson, however, suffering from the horror and shock of whatever tragedy it was that had occurred there in the dark Yucatan jungles, did not regain consciousness until two days later. When he did recover he cleared up the mystery in a few incoherent words. For almost two weeks he and the party had progressed up the river, Carson stated, making camp at intervals along its banks, and it was at the fourth or fifth of these camps that the catastrophe had occurred. Carson, with his geological passion uppermost, had wandered away from the camp to examine some great boulders farther up the river, he said, making his way clearly by the light of the full moon that swung overhead. He had finished his inspection and was returning toward the camp, he stated, when there had come a terrific flash of brilliant light stabbing down into the camp ahead. He had rushed forward to find the camp a scene of death, the shattered bodies of his four friends and of the dozen natives sprawled about, while tracks by the river's edge showed that Howland had been struck there by the same death and had fallen into the waters and had been carried away. Carson, knowing that a giant lightning bolt had suddenly wiped out all the party but himself, had loaded the bodies of his friends into one of the canoes, had scooped a grave in the soft sand for the natives, and then had pushed off and with horror-numbed brain had pressed down the river, losing consciousness wholly after days of such horror-driven progress, to be found when his canoe and its terrible cargo drifted down to the village at the river's mouth.

Carson's story thus explained the whole apparently inexplicable matter, to the satisfaction of all. The freakish effects of lightning strokes on human bodies were well known, and it was only such a freak of forces that could explain those bodies' condition. Carson's explanation, therefore, was officially adopted by the authorities at Progreso, and forwarded by them to the Mid-Western University officials. It was suggested by some at Progreso, indeed, that a body of investigation be sent to the scene of the tragedy, but the suggestion was not adopted, either by Carson or the officials. Nothing further could be learned from such an arduous journey, it was pointed out, and it would be impossible to recover Howland's body from the swirling depths of the Carajos. Also the natives' superstitious fear of the interior jungles had been so enhanced by the tragedy, that none would accompany a party on such a trip. So, with the matter explained to the satisfaction of most, the Progreso officials rested and Carson sailed for home.

By the time that Carson arrived, the sensation, which had been headlined by the nation's newspapers for a week, had lessened greatly in importance. The mystery of the deaths of Howland and his friends explained, the press quickly forsook the matter, with perfunctory expressions of regret for the loss of five such brilliant scientists. Even at Mid-Western University the first shock and excitement of the tragedy had passed, and though it was still discussed, it was no longer the sole topic of conversation. It seemed assumed, even by the University's officials, that the Progreso officials were right in stating that nothing more could be done about the matter. So that by the time Carson arrived, though there had been resolutions of regret and the like on all hands, none had considered it as a subject for further action.

To Harlan Trent and to myself, though, the conclusion of the tragedy seemed unsatisfactory enough. From the first stunning report of the matter we had followed it intently through the lengthy press-articles and it seemed incredible to us, who with Carson had made up Howland's three closest friends, that the matter could end thus, that Carson could return without further efforts to discover his friend's fate. Because of that we were full of questions we desired to put to him on his arrival. It was not until some twenty-four hours after Carson's arrival, though, when we three were smoking silently in my rooms with the smoke of our pipes mingling with the scent of the warm May night that came through the open windows, that we put to him any of those questions.

For a moment after our queries he was silent, his strong face thoughtful, his eyes looking far away. Then, at last, he turned toward us.

"No," he said, in answer to our first question. "Howland's body could not be found." He paused, his eyes strange, and then added: "It could not, because Howland still lives."

We stared at him in utter astonishment for moments, and then Trent, his voice strained, was speaking.

"Howland lives!" he repeated. "But why did you leave him then, Carson? And where on earth is he?"

Carson did not answer, for the moment, gazing at us for but a moment, then turning to the open window beside him. Outside lay the warm darkness of the May night, the dark masses of trees and buildings looming deeper in that darkness. Above, swinging down toward the western horizon from the zenith, hung the crescent moon, a great sickle of shining silver in the heavens. For moments Carson gazed up toward its gleaming crescent in silence, then turned about to where we stood wondering beside him.

"Howland is not on earth at all," he said, quietly. "Howland——tonight——is somewhere on the moon!"

CHAPTER II

The Moon Raiders

"ON the moon!"

The exclamations of Trent and me came together, as we stood there all but stupefied by Carson's statement; but he nodded calmly.

"There is much to tell you," he said, "much that I could not tell when I came back to consciousness there at Progreso, that I dared tell only you two, who know

me and can believe. It is unbelievable, almost, but I think that you will believe. Had I told this to the villagers at Progreso, they would have deemed me mad, would have accused me, I think, of the murder of my own friends. So for my own sake—and for Howland's—I caused them to think what all now think, that a lightning-bolt had struck and annihilated our party. But it was no lightning-bolt that did so! It was a power greater and more terrible than the lightning, one of which I alone on earth know, and of which I dared tell no one else.

"The story that I told at Progreso was correct, up to a certain point. We did, as I said, progress up the river in stages, making camp at regular intervals along the river's bank and using these camps as bases for our investigations. At each one we would set out on our studies. Borkoff and Grant were busy with the fauna and flora of the region, classifying and noting unusual characteristics which might prove connecting links with similar animal and plant forms of Africa. In the same way Glitz, the entomologist, was collecting and classifying species similar to African insect-forms, while Howland, and Willings, received and classified in importance the evidence the others brought in. My own work, as geologist, was intended to be the study of any geological formations which might indicate that sometime in the past a subsidence of the level of the Yucatan region had taken place. Such a subsidence, if it could be proved to have taken place, would help to prove that a similar subsidence of the island-chain between Yucatan and Africa had taken place also. We each were busy with our work, therefore, and Howland, as we pushed farther up the river, became more and more enthusiastic over the prospects of proving his theory.

"Four such camps we had made within the first twelve or thirteen days, and it was at the end of two weeks of progress that we made our fifth camp. Our journey up the river, until then, had been the usual one of Central American travelers, an unceasing and toilsome progress against the stiff currents, between banks that were impenetrable walls of jungle vegetation, with the blue mountains glimpsed now and then in the distance. I think that in those two weeks we had progressed not more than sixty miles, but it might have been six hundred for the utter wildness of the region. During the last ten days we had met not even an Indian, and as we knew that above the first score or so of miles the Carajos had been little explored by white men, we were not surprised at the region's wildness. Our own paddlers, though, were becoming more and more unwilling to progress further up the river. We attributed their unwillingness at first to the stiffening currents which we were now fighting in the narrowing river, but they finally informed us that they feared to go farther, because the upper reaches of the river were the haunts of evil spirits, and had been shunned since time immemorial by the natives of the region. By means of increased wages we induced them to keep on, and so at last made our fifth camp.

"It was in a small clearing in the jungle at the river's bank that we made that camp. Back from that clearing there sloped upward the side of a great, jungle-covered mound, perhaps a thousand feet in height, a squat, cone-like hill, at the foot of which stood the clearing. Howland, I remember, was very elated on the night that we camped there, since already, as he believed, we had collected enough scientific evidence almost to support his theory. At this camp, he told me, we would perhaps be able to collect enough to make that proof conclusive, and would not need be press farther up the river. To Howland, and to the rest of us, it seemed that we were on the very threshold of complete success. And then, on that same night, there struck—the terror.

"It was some hours before midnight that the thing came upon us. Darkness lay over the world by then, a darkness that was stygian in the jungle's depths about us, but the clearing, in which our camp stood, was bathed in the silvery light of the full moon, climbing up toward the zenith. Howland, Willings and Grant, in one of the tents, were going over some of their specimens by the light of a gasoline lantern, while in another Borkoff and Glitz were mending some of the torn clothing of the party. Our paddlers had gathered, as though for protection, about a fire near the clearing's edge. Gazing about, I remembered a curious formation of boulders which I had noticed a little way up the river after we had camped, and as the full moon's light was very bright, thought to stroll up toward them for a preliminary investigation. So, calling out to Howland what I intended to do, I set off along the river's edge, following the clear strip of sand along the water.

"THE moonlight was so brilliant that I had no difficulty in finding the rocks I sought, and then for perhaps a half hour I examined them, moving around them. When at last I turned from them, and started back to the camp along the bank, I noticed that the moon had now reached a position directly overhead, a great shining shield hanging there above me. I moved on, toward the camp, and in a minute more could hear its sounds, the high clear voice of Howland, the low murmurs of the natives grouped around the fire. A moment more would bring me within sight of it, I knew. But in that moment, before I could take another step, there came the light.

"It was like no light ever seen by man before. It was a gigantic shaft of blinding brilliance, a mighty beam of pure, concentrated and dazzling white light, hundreds of feet across, that stabbed down toward us from directly overhead! A colossal brilliant ray that shot downward from the heavens and vanished, in a single instant, all but blinding me even as I shrank back stunned. I had seen, though, that that mighty beam had struck the top of the great mound behind our camp, lightning-like. I had sensed, rather than seen, something that had seemed to flash down before that beam. Stunned, eyes blinded from the brilliance of the terrific light, I stood dazed for a moment, hearing the excited cries of Howland and the others, the sudden wails of the natives. I sprang forward, was at the clearing's edge in a moment, saw Howland and the others running toward the great mound excitedly, saw the natives huddled in fear apparently at the clearing's edge. I was about to spring after my friends when I saw them, at the foot of the great mound's slope, stop suddenly short. And then the next moment I too had stopped short, there at the clearing's edge, was gazing like Howland and the others up toward the great mound's summit.

"For from that mound's summit had come suddenly a strange sound, a great muffled clang of metal. Astonished, I stood there, gazing toward the mound, while Howland and the others at the mound's foot gazed up likewise, while the natives crouched fearfully in the clearing. Then from the mound came other sounds, a low muffled throbbing of power that grew quickly louder, and then burst suddenly upon our ears. And at the same instant that it did so I saw rising from the interior of the mound itself, apparently, a half-score of dark, flat shapes of great size, great flat circles or disks, their diameter a hundred feet approximately, with a low protecting wall around their edges, from which the throbbing came and which were floating smoothly up into the air above the mound! They floated up, hung there for a moment in the brilliant moonlight, and then as though they had glimpsed our

camp, were suddenly slanting downward from the mound's summit toward our clearing!

"It was that that broke the spell of astonishment that had been laid upon Howland and the others there who watched. Howland himself still stood utterly dumfounded, but the others, sensing peril, had uttered sharp cries, were leaping back, away from the mound, toward the river. Within another moment those flat great circles had shot downward through the moonlight, above the clearing, and then there was a hiss of suddenly released force, and from the hovering circles' sides there stabbed downward a half-dozen broad beams of pale and misty green light. Down those beams shot toward the running Willings and the others, toward the fear-crazed natives leaping to the river, and as they struck through the air, a swift succession of terrific detonations struck my ears. Then, as I stood there still inside the jungle's edge, spellbound with horror, I saw Willings and the others stagger and fall as the pale green beams struck them, saw their bodies swell out, shatter, *explode!*

"Even in that horror-stunned moment I guessed, I think, what it was that I was seeing, what terrific weapon it was that was embodied in that misty pale green ray. It was a vacuum-producing ray, I saw even then, one that destroyed instantly whatever atmosphere or air it touched, without affecting other matter. It was thus, I guessed, that the green rays had slain Willings and the others, but even as the thought flashed across my brain it passed, since now the great flat circles were dipping toward the clearing's surface!

And from the hovering circles' sides there stabbed downward a half-dozen broad beams of pale and misty green light—toward the running Willings and the others

"HOWLAND had stood in that dread instant of death in his tracks, motionless with astounded horror as I was, and because he had not fled, the rays had not stabbed toward him. The circles were swooping down toward him, their throbbing loud in my ears, and for the first time my own peril came home to my terror-dazed brain and I shrank back into the jungle at whose edge I stood. There, crouching in the thick vegetation, I gazed with pounding heart out into the moonlit clearing as the circles slanted downward. I saw them land swiftly about Howland, saw that they were grouped in a ring about him there on the ground, great flat circles of metal gleaming in the moonlight, noticed scores of vague shapes upon the surface of those circles, about a central mechanism that seemed to propel and guide them. Then, as I crouched there, there slid aside sections in the protecting walls of the circles, and out of them upon the ground there stepped a score or more of shapes toward Howland, shapes at sight of which a cry of horror all but escaped me. I had, unconsciously, looked upon these terrible attackers as human, at least, but it was not human shapes that stepped forward into the moonlight. They were not men at all, as we know them. They were—turtle-men!

"Turtle-men! It is only by that term that I can describe them, since the bulbous, upright body of each, some four feet in height, was encased completely in thick, dark shell. From the lower part of that shell-cased body projected two powerful thick limbs ending in broad-webbed and taloned paws, while similar shorter limbs or arms jutted from the body's upper portion. There was an opening in the body's case of shell at the top, and from that opening there projected upward on a flexible, snake-like white neck, the tapering, turtle-like head, its two lidless eyes set on either side with the narrow mouth between them. So grotesque were these turtle-creatures in their mingled familiar and unfamiliar appearance that I felt my senses reeling as I gazed upon them. Then I gripped myself, saw that some of the turtle-men held weapons or instruments of gleaming metal in their grasp, small metal hemispheres to whose curved side a handle was attached and whose flat side they kept turned upon Howland, who stood still swaying in spellbound horror before them.

"A moment they faced him, holding those gleaming hemispheres which were apparently containers of the deadly vacuum ray, and then one spoke. His voice was not loud but was of deeply-vibrating chords, a deep bass so low that many tones in it were but barely caught by my ears. It was to Howland that he had spoken, apparently, though his meaning was of course totally unintelligible to him. Howland, though, spoke back in answer, his voice unsteady, apparently to show the creatures that he was intelligent also. They regarded him again in silence, held for a few moments a deep-toned conversation among themselves, and then, still threatening Howland with the hemispheres, came closer to him, examined the clothing he wore, his general appearance, then stepped back from him. Then one, apparently the leader, uttered a deep order, and at once two of the creatures behind him had stepped forward and had secured Howland's hands behind him with swift-clicking metal bonds of some kind, had secured his ankles likewise and were carrying him to one of the flying-circles resting upon the ground behind them, into which they placed him. Howland was a prisoner!

"All this had taken but moments to enact, there in the brilliant moonlight of the clearing, and now, with Howland disposed of, the turtle-men turned their attention to the camp itself. Swiftly they began a thorough examination of all in it, of the bodies of the scientists lying not far from them, of the natives lying beyond, of the tents and of all in them. I shrank back into the protecting darkness of the jungle vegetation about me as they came nearer, and heard their deep tones only yards away from me, as they carried on their

examination. Brain whirling, I watched them. From whence had these turtle-men come, who had emerged from the great mound to pour death upon our camp? Could it be that they had come up from unknown depths in earth's bowels to pour it out upon us? But what of that mighty flash of light that I had seen, that had stabbed down toward the mound from the heavens overhead?

"Once I saw a group of the turtle-men, in the midst of their searchings, stop to gesture up toward the silver shield of the full moon, that was sinking now toward the west with the swift passing of the night. They all gazed up toward it for a moment with their unwinking eyes, then turned back to their search. It flashed across my brain, then, that when the great light-beam had shot down to the mound, the moon had been directly overhead, and for a moment I wondered if there were any connection between that and the appearance of these strange raiders. Then such speculations passed from my mind as, fascinated with horror, I watched the activities of the turtle-creatures, watched them examining all in our camp. All the books, written records, and gathered specimens and notes in the tents they transferred at once to the flying-circles. The same was done with all tools and apparatus and mechanisms of any kind which they found. I saw some of them with strange little mechanisms engaged apparently in compressing air into small metal containers, storing them in the circles also, saw others do the same with the waters of the river, storing away similar samples of that water. It was a scene of extraordinary activity, there in the moonlit clearing, and I watched it fascinated until the sinking of the moon and the growing pale light in the east warned me that day was dawning. Then I shrank back further into the thick vegetation.

"DAY broke, but the turtle-men in the clearing continued their examination and inspection of all things about them with unabated vigor. I dared not venture closer to the clearing in the revealing light of day, but I could see them moving about, could hear their deep tones, and see Howland sprawled out and bound inside the wall of one of the flying-circles. It was that last sight that occupied me most, for my first horror of the turtle-men had passed somewhat, and I thought only of rescuing Howland from their grasp. It seemed death to attempt it, though, since about the flying circles there moved unceasingly the turtle-creatures, a full hundred in all, and more than half of them were armed always with the hemispheres that held the deadly vacuum ray. So through all that day, hour after endless hour, I crouched there in the thick jungle, with the blazing sun beating down above, thirsty, fearful, watching and waiting.

"Night came at last, and as its first hours passed, it was evident that they were ending their activities. They had collected samples or specimens of almost all things about them, of air, water and earth, of the animals they had seen in the jungle, penetrating almost to my place of hiding in pursuit of the latter. Birds, too, and insects, and plants they had gathered and placed in the flying-circles, and it flashed across my brain that these raiders, from wherever they had come, had come to reconnoiter earth only, to collect specimens of its life, to ascertain its condition, and that Howland, to them, was simply another such specimen! The thought spurred me on to attempt to free him, yet the turtle-men moved in numbers about the clearing so that such an attempt would have been suicide. At last, though, my chance came, a chance so slender that it seemed none. The turtle-men had brought their work to a close, and now as darkness fell swiftly over the land, and as the moon's silver disk again swung up toward the zenith, they had moved toward the edge of the clearing and were gazing up toward the moon's brilliant circle. For the moment the flying-circles were left unguarded, and in that moment I slipped noiselessly out of the jungle's darkness into the moonlit clearing, toward the flying-circle in which Howland lay.

"A few low bushes grew here and there in the clearing, and it was from one to another of these that I now dodged, screening myself as well as possible in their shadow, moving swiftly and with pounding heart toward Howland and the flying-circle on which he lay. I was nearer to it, was crouching for a moment in the shadow of a small shrub not thirty feet from it, and the turtle-men had still not turned from the clearing's edge where they stood. My hopes ran high in that instant, and I slipped quickly on, and saw Howland, roused by some sound I made, struggle up on his elbow and recognize me with wide eyes as I slipped toward him, then saw him turn in startled manner, and heard an agonized whisper of 'Back, Carson!' from him. For at that moment, at the clearing's edge, the turtle-men had turned and were coming straight toward me!

"A MOMENT I seemed to see death loom close, then instinctively I shrank back and downward, into the scant shadow of the small bush behind me, while the turtle-men came on across the clearing. They had not perceived me as yet, but in the scant shadow in which I lay I knew that it would be a miracle if they failed to see me now. They came closer while I crouched there, my heart beats racing. The strange creatures seemed all about me, their deep bass voices vibrating on all sides; they were all but treading on me as they moved toward and into their flying-circles. I saw the sections of wall at the edge of these snapping shut, saw the great circles lift smoothly and suddenly upward, as there came from them a sudden throbbing of power, and then knew that they had not seen me. Above me the great circles were massing, dark disks in the light of the moon overhead, and then they were moving away, were slanting back up toward the summit of the great mound! They were going back to the place from which they had come, and were taking Howland with them!

"As that thought burned across my brain I lost all caution, and rose erect, ran recklessly across the clearing toward the great mound, struggled up the side of it through the thick vegetation that clothed that side. Half-mad I toiled upward, saw above me that the flying-circles had massed above the mound's flat summit, and seemed to be sinking one by one down into that summit. One by one they sank from sight above me, while I toiled frantically upward, their throbbing suddenly muffled as they disappeared, until in a few moments more all had disappeared, while I was still but half-way up to the summit. I struggled frenziedly on, brain on fire, staggered up at last through the last detaining growths, and out on the broad flat summit of the mound. Out across it I stumbled, then suddenly stopped, reeled back. For there before me, yawning in the summit of the great mound, was a mighty shaft-like opening, hundreds of feet across, a great well, whose sides were lined with smooth metal and which extended down into the mound and the earth beneath it for a depth of thousands of feet!

"The full moon was almost directly overhead, now, and its light struck down into that mighty shaft to show me that far at its bottom, thousands of feet below, there gleamed a floor of metal, a metal floor at the center of which was set a great flat circle of black, shining matter like black glass. Upon this circle there stood a giant cylinder that almost covered it, a great metal cylinder more than a hundred feet in diameter and fully three hundred in height. The top surface of this

cylinder was slid outward in two sections, to either side, and down into its hollow interior, one by one, were floating the flying-circles of the turtle-men, stacking one above the other inside that cylinder! One by one they floated down into it until all were within it, until the great cylinder seemed filled with them, and then, with a great clang of metal, the two sections of the top slid back into place, closing its top!

"There was an instant then in which I stared down in utter astonishment, and then, as understanding of it all flashed suddenly across my brain, I staggered to the great shaft's edge, cried out hoarsely, cried out madly to Howland who had vanished with the turtle-men inside that cylinder. But even as I cried out, the end came. The full moon, creeping westward across the zenith, reached a point directly above me, above the shaft, that great shaft aimed upward toward the moon's silver disk like the barrel of some great gun. The next instant there came a clanging great bell-note from near the black-shining disk on which the cylinder rested, a humming that held for a moment, and then suddenly up from that disk there stabbed toward the zenith, toward the full moon overhead, a terrific column of blinding white brilliance, a giant beam of dazzling light that leaped up from the great shaft in the mound and reached out toward the moon's bright disk! And even as that blinding beam had flashed and vanished before me I had perceived with a sense almost other than sight, that the great metal cylinder beneath had flashed up with it!

"Blinded, stunned, I staggered to the great shaft's edge, gazed down into it. The great humming beneath had ceased, and I could make out the black-shining disk far beneath, but there was no cylinder upon it. There were big shapes about it, there were other great cylinders grouped here and there around it, but the cylinder that held the turtle-men and Howland had vanished, driven out by that blinding beam, I knew, out toward the moon itself! Driven out toward the moon's bright disk that swung still overhead, out of the great shaft in the mound in which no life was now, out by the beam from the black-shining disk below! Projected out through the gulf of space in their great cylinder by that awful column of brilliance, out from earth to moon!

"The moon! I saw it all then, as I swayed there with its bright disk above me. The moon! It was from there that the turtle-men had come in their cylinder, shot across the gulf from moon to earth by a great propelling beam of brilliance, landing there in the great shaft of the mound and pouring out from their cylinder, in their flying-circles, to descend upon our camp. For, I remembered now, it had only been when the moon had been directly overhead that that first great beam had shot downward with the cylinder before it. They had reconnoitered earth's condition, collected samples and specimens, taking Howland himself as one of them, and then on the next night had returned to their cylinder, had waited until the moon was directly overhead once more, and then had driven out toward it, propelled by a similar brilliant beam from the disk at the shaft's bottom. Raiders from the moon, that had driven back toward it and had taken Howland with them!"

CHAPTER III

Out to the Moon!

"RAIDERS from the moon! I remember shaking my hand madly toward its calm-shining [illegible] above me, remember stumbling, weeping with horror, down the great mound's side into the clearing. There, working as one in a daze and driven [illegible] some remnant of reason in my [illegible] the bodies of my friends into one of the canoes, scooped a grave in the sand for the natives sprawled there, and then pushed off in that canoe, down the river. Down—down—days, hours, of progress that seemed but unmeasured eternities of horror to my darkened mind. Then at last consciousness completely left me, and I awoke at Progreso, learned how I had been found drifting down the river, and was told of the great sensation that had been caused by that finding. I knew, at once, that were I to tell my tale it would not be credited for an instant, would never be investigated, even, and that I would be regarded as mad and as the mad slayer of my friends. So, for that reason, I told only of seeing a great light-flash, and let them think it a lightning-bolt that had destroyed the party, explaining Howland's disappearance by stating that the bolt that had destroyed him had knocked his body into the river. None questioned my story, which to them could alone account for the strange shattering of my friends' bodies, and so I came back here, knowing that to you two, who knew Howland and know me, I could tell my tale and be believed.

"I came back, but determined to return again, to return to that great mound whose shaft holds the secret of the moon raiders, the great projector whose beam drove them outward. The presence of that projector there in that great shaft proves that it has been there since time immemorial, there in the great mound, and that in the far past, eons in the past, perhaps, these moon creatures had established communication between earth and moon. They had driven down from moon to earth in their cylinders propelled by a great beam from their apparatus on the moon, I suppose, and once on earth had placed there, in the shaft of the mound, a similar apparatus whose beam drove them back up to the moon. And now, after what countless ages we cannot guess, they have used this method once more, have come down in a raiding, exploring party to reconnoiter earth's present condition, and have returned with Howland as their prisoner.

"They have returned with Howland to the moon, but will they come again? I think that they will; I think that these first swift raiders were but a scouting party for myriads of moon creatures that are to follow. I think that out on our moon, a world in which existence must be increasingly difficult for them, these turtle-creatures are gathering their hordes for a descent upon earth, which they visited long ago, and which they now intend to visit in force, to invade, to conquer. To conquer! For they will conquer, their deadly vacuum rays and swift flying-circles are weapons men cannot stand against, when that dread invasion comes. And now that the first raiders have returned to the moon, taking Howland with them as a specimen of earth's present races, I think that it will be soon that that invasion will come, that their great cylinders will flash down their mighty force-beam to earth, cylinders filled with countless fly[illegible] A ruthless invasion of our world from its own circling satellite!

"But one chance is left to us, I think, to stay that dread invasion. We cannot warn the world now of the doom that gathers above it, for never would the world believe, as you know well. But if we could, in some way, penetrate out to the moon itself, to whatever part of it holds these turtle-creatures' races, could find Howland and learn their plans, their purposes, I think that we could [illegible] with us evidence that even the most [illegible] would heed. I think that if we could [illegible] back, he at least would [illegible] of the peril that hangs [illegible] accomplish it [illegible] of the great

mound in Yucatan, the projector whose beam drove the cylinder of the moon raiders out to the moon, and which can drive a cylinder of our own outward in the same way. For that is my plan; that we three go down to that mound and its projector, use that projector and one of the cylinders I saw beside it to hurl us out to the moon, and there attempt to find and rescue Howland and bring him back with us to earth, to bring back proof to earth of the doom that threatens it from its moon!"

CARSON'S voice ceased, and the silence that followed seemed almost tangible, broken only by the sighing of the warm night breeze outside. Trent and I sat staring toward the speaker, astounded and appalled by what we had heard. But it was Trent who broke the silence first.

"To go out to the moon—to find Howland and bring him back—" he said, unsteadily. "Carson, it seems unthinkable that we could do it, that there are such creatures on the moon who have captured Howland and taken him back there!"

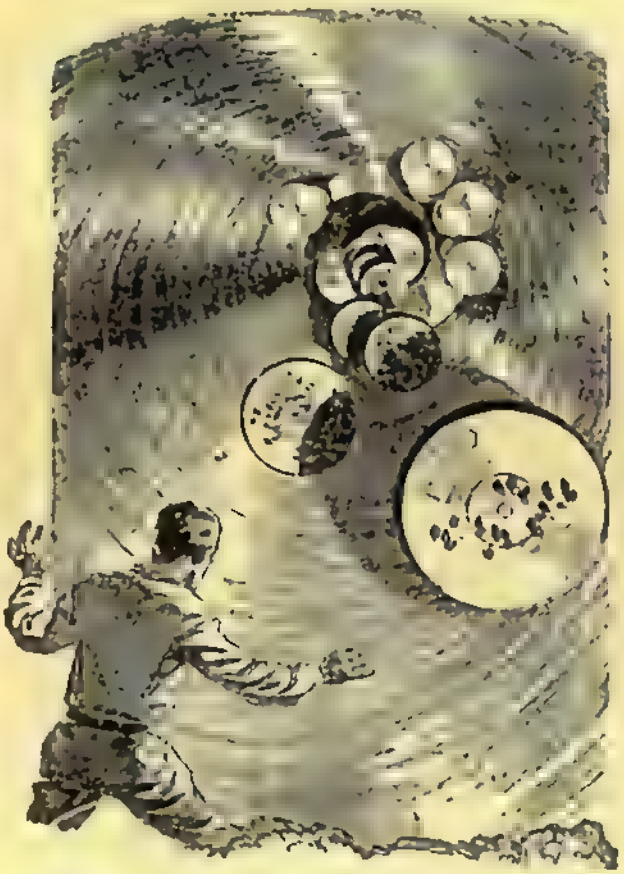
Carson gazed somberly toward him. "But it is so," he said, his eyes brooding. "They captured Howland—and tonight he is out there on the moon with them."

"But creatures from the moon!" I exclaimed. "Creatures from what we know is a wholly dead world!"

Carson shook his head. "We don't know that, Foster," he said. "Our astronomers know less almost about the moon than about other heavenly bodies considering its nearness. They have measured its dimensions and distances, they have weighed it, they have speculated on its origin, but what can they say with certainty as to the moon itself? What can they say as to the origin of its mighty craters, craters which volcanic origin could never have formed, and which they attribute to giant meteors striking the moon? For if such great meteors actually had caused those craters, we could discern them now half-buried in them, yet such giant meteors never have been discovered on the moon's surface! What can they say as to the great sheets of brilliant, glassy substance that glitter around the crater of Tycho and here and there across the moon's whole face? What can they say certainly about the moon, above all, when one side of its sphere has never been seen by the eye of man, turned always away from earth, as the moon revolves about earth? Who can say what mysteries might not exist upon that other side?

"And these moon creatures, these turtle-beings who came down from moon to earth in their cylinder on that beam of force, is it wholly incredible that such creatures should inhabit our moon? Once that moon was as inhabitable as earth, we know, and if then these turtle-creatures rose to intelligence and power, why should they not have been able to preserve themselves through the centuries as their world died about them? Their power, their science, was great, we know, since ages ago it must have been that they visited earth, built that projector in the mound here on earth, and with that power and that science could they not continue their existence on the moon, perhaps within its depths, perhaps upon the other side? To creatures who could contrive the great projectors whose beams drove their cylinders from moon to earth and back, the contriving of artificial supplies of atmosphere and water would not be hard.

"Powerful and intelligent, those moon creatures have never made attempts to communicate with us on earth, have never, through the ages, made use of the projector which they set here on earth long ago, have never until now revisited earth, thinking it perhaps still uninhabited by intelligent creatures. Now they have come, though, raiders, explorers, the forerunners of the hordes that I think gather now to follow. But one thing puzzles me about these moon creatures. They must naturally be accustomed to the smaller gravitational power of the moon upon which they live, and so should have been greatly affected by the greater gravitational power of earth, should have been hardly able to move here on earth because of that greater power, just as men upon the moon would be affected by its lesser gravitational power, and could with their earthly muscles leap and step enormous distances. But it was not so with these moon creatures, for when they emerged from their flying-circles to earth's surface, they moved as freely and as unhampered as though they had always lived here. That alone I cannot understand. I can understand clearly the fact of their existence, and the fact that after existing on the moon for ages, unknown to men, they have now begun to look toward our earth, to prepare for a descent upon it."



. . . Down into its hollow interior, one by one, were floating the flying-circles of the turtle-men, stacking one above the other inside that cylinder!

Carson paused, and then Trent, slowly and thoughtfully, was speaking.

"I understand now too, Carson," he was saying, "understand and believe that these moon creatures have, as you say, captured Howland—are gathering to pour down upon us. Yet, even so, can we really follow them, out the projector's beam, to the moon itself?"

Carson nodded calmly. "We can," he said simply. "The great projector is still there in the shaft that has held it for ages, and beside it in that shaft, as I said, I could see other cylinders like that in which the moon creatures came and went. How they turn on that great beam I know not, but I do know that that beam is only turned on when the projector is pointed exactly at some certain spot upon the moon, a spot toward which the cylinders are driven by the beam. For it was only when the moon was directly above the shaft on the first night that the great beam from the moon drove down, driving the moon raiders' cylinder into that shaft exactly. And on the second night, it was only when the moon's disk

was exactly above the shaft again that the great beam drove up from that shaft, driving the cylinder from earth out to the moon. Much there is that we cannot know, cannot guess, about that great enigmatic projector which has lain there in the shaft of the mound for ages, but if the moon creatures operated it to drive them back out to the moon, there is a chance that we can operate it and can follow them. It is the one chance given to us to rescue Howland and to stay the dark doom that is gathering above our world. And shall not we three take it?"

He was silent once more, and in that silent moment our eyes sought, held each others, while through the window beside us there fell upon us the pale brilliance of the crescent moon, a silver scimitar sinking westward through the night. Then suddenly, instinctively, our three hands came out together, clasped tightly.

"We'll take it!" I cried. "We'll go down to the great mound and the projector inside it, and use that projector and its beam to drive us out after the moon raiders and Howland—out to the moon!"

CHAPTER IV

The Cylinder Starts

CARSON ceased paddling, suddenly, and pointed ahead. "The mound!" he exclaimed. "And there's the camp beneath us!"

Trent and I gazed tensely ahead. The canoe in which we three sat floated in the middle of a narrow yellow waterway, propelled upstream against its strong currents by our paddles. On either side, shading us partially from the heat of the Yucatan sun that blazed above, there rose the tangled thick green walls of the jungle's trees and brush, extending away on either side of the narrowing river for league upon savage league. Ahead though, perhaps a quarter-mile up the river from us, there rose from out the jungle's green sea the squat, great bulk of a mighty mound, like a great rough cone in shape, truncated, or flattened at the summit. Clad with thick vegetation itself, it rose like a green hill from the jungle's tangled plain, and beneath it, between its base and the river, we could discern the brown shapes of tents, pitched in a small clearing, some of them flattened by storms.

"The mound!" I repeated, gazing toward it. "And in it is the shaft—and the projector!"

For days that great green bulk toward which we now gazed had been foremost in all our thoughts. It had been days, weeks, before, that we two had heard Carson's terrible story, had agreed with him to go to this mound to carry out our great plan. We had swiftly secured leaves from the University, had left Mid-Western for New Orleans, and within another few days had reached Progreso by steamer. There, concealing our true mission, we had stated only that we intended to take up again that scientific work of Howland's which had been interrupted by the tragic end of his party. The officials at Progreso had done their best to dissuade us, but had in the end given up, and we had proceeded to the village at the mouth of the Carajos, buying there one of the native canoes and stowing in it our equipment. We had intended from the first to make the trip up-river alone, and found that in any case none in the village would have dared ever to accompany us, so intensified were their ordinary superstitious fears by the tragedy that had befallen the Howland party. So, pushing up-stream alone in our canoe, we had progressed slowly up the river for more than a dozen days, coming at last now within sight of the great mound that was our goal.

Carson, after his first exclamation on sighting the mound, had bent silently and grimly to his paddle, and as Trent and I did likewise, we sent our slender craft spinning upward against the currents toward the camp in the clearing ahead. That clearing lay just at the river's bank, we saw, a level and roughly circular patch of open ground in the jungle, and as we swept nearer toward it we noticed that of the several tents there only one still stood erect, all the others having been battered by rain and wind. Carson, as we swept nearer, pointed mutely to the canoes still drawn up along the bank, dumb evidence of the dozen natives who had paddled them once, and who now lay buried somewhere in the sand along the river's edge. Another moment and our own canoe had shot in among them. We had stepped out and had secured it to the bank, lifting our equipment from it out into the clearing; then we stood motionless for a moment, gazing about us.

Standing there with Trent and Carson, the thing of which I was most conscious at the moment was the silence of the place. A silence, a hushed stillness, seemed to lie over it, which the monotonous sound of the flowing waters behind us seemed only to intensify. Brilliant birds flashed now and then across the clearing from the encircling jungles, and there was an occasional rustle of some small animal in the vegetation, but the main impression was of a silence and stillness unnatural and foreboding. Carson, beside me, suddenly pointed silently down to the clearing's surface, and as we looked across the soft sand, we saw that upon it were many tracks, some of them tracks of human shoes and feet, but most of them great, paw-like tracks with four taloned toes, such as I had never seen before. At the sight, my heart raced suddenly faster and I raised my eyes to Carson with interrogation in them.

"The moon-creatures?" I whispered, and he nodded.

"The moon-creatures' tracks," he said, in the same low tone. "Everything here seems as I left it."

Trent was gazing intently up toward the great mound whose summit loomed distantly up from the jungle beyond the clearing.

"The mound," he said, "we'll head for it at once?"

Carson shook his head. "Not at once," he told him. "We'll settle our equipment here first, and start for the mound at sunset. I've calculated that for tonight and several nights, a few hours before midnight, the full moon will be passing over the shaft just as it did a month ago, and I want to be at the projector when that happens, and before it. We'll have time enough."

So, for the next few hours, we occupied ourselves with getting our equipment ready. Setting up our own small tent—we all had an odd reluctance toward using the tents about us—we then arranged beside it the equipment we had brought, laying aside the items which we expected to take with us on our desperate expedition. Among these latter was the rope-ladder we intended to use in descending into the mound's shaft, one of a half-mile in length, almost, yet small in bulk for its length and strength. Heavy automatics and cartridge belts were to form our weapons, with the addition of sheath-knives. In the light knapsacks we were taking with us, were packed condensed foods sufficient for many days, and an assortment of selected drugs. Distributed among us, too, was a compact assortment of small steel tools. Slight enough equipment it was for the most desperate journey men had ever attempted, but we had pinned all to our faith that if the moon creatures could flash across the gulf in their cylinders without other special equipment, we could do so also.

THE sorting and assembling of this equipment took us the remaining hours of the afternoon, and as the brilliant tropic sun slanted westward, we prepared and ate a quick meal, then started on our climb toward

the great mound's summit. Carson led, choosing the easiest path through the thick jungle vegetation, while Trent and I followed, bearing the coiled rope-ladder's weight between us. The sun was dipping swiftly toward the west as we pressed on through the tangled masses, and started up the great mound's slope. That slope, we found, was steeper by far than it had seemed from below, and hampered as we were with our equipment and with the weight of the coils of the great ladder, our progress was slow. By the time we had reached the mound's summit, the brilliant sunset was fast fading westward, while high in the heavens eastward the white disk of the full moon was climbing toward the zenith through the darkening skies.

We gave but small attention for the moment to these, all our interest centering on the flat summit on which we found ourselves. A fairly level circle of several hundred feet in diameter was that summit, almost barren of vegetation, but what held our eyes was the great opening that yawned at its center, taking up the great part of the summit itself. It was a great, well-like shaft, at least four hundred feet across, whose smooth metal sides sank vertically downward into depths invisible, whose gathering shadows our eyes could not penetrate, into depths that seemed to us unfathomable as we gazed down in awe into them. We could make out nothing in the shadows beneath, and at last lifted our eyes and looked toward each other. The heavens above had darkened swiftly, and now the pale light of the full moon swinging upward fell upon us, and upon all the far-reaching stretches of jungle that we could vaguely discern from the mound's summit. At last Carson broke the silence.

"Time to go," he said quietly. "We must be down at the shaft's bottom when the moon swings directly above it."

Swiftly we uncoiled the slender length of the great ladder, fastening one end of it firmly into the ground at the shaft's edge by means of stakes we had brought for the purpose. Then, letting the rest of the ladder unroll into the great well, we saw it disappear into the shadows far beneath until it hung steady, vanishing down into those shadows. Carson stepped toward the ladder, then paused, turned and gazed out once more over the distant reaches of the moonlit jungle. We stood gazing, the same thought unspoken in all our minds. Would we ever look out on that moonlit scene again? Then Carson had turned back to the ladder, had knelt and swung himself over the great shaft's edge, holding to it, and then was moving down its length, down the colossal well's side, like an insect crawling down a string.

Another moment and I had followed him, had swung over the edge of the abyss like him, gripping the ladder. As I did so, gazed down and glimpsed the vast depths that yawned beneath, disappearing down into the shadows below, a sudden nausea gripped me for an instant as I swung there dizzily. Then, clinging tightly to the rope rungs, I forced it away, began slowly to descend. Rung after rung, step after step, down the ladder I went. The smooth gleaming metal of the great shaft's wall was all that I could see as I clambered steadily downward. Gazing up, I saw Trent above, following me, his figure darkly outlined against the moonlit sky. Glancing down, I could make out Carson's shape as a deeper shadow against the shadows far beneath, caught a glimpse of his face as a white blur against those shadows as he glanced up toward me. Down—down—still downward we descended, rung after rung, yard after yard, until the mouth of the great shaft had become but a dwindling circle of pale light far above us.

The shadows about us were deepening swiftly as we descended farther into the shaft, and I judged that we had already climbed down for more than a thousand feet, yet in the deep dusk beneath was no sign that we were nearing the bottom. Down—down—a seemingly endless descent, that became soon almost automatic on my part, an unconscious and unceasing movement of arms and legs that steadily took me further down into the great shaft's shadows. Those shadows had deepened to darkness about us, by then, and by the time that I estimated our downward climb at two thousand feet, we were descending in a stygian darkness in which we could not even see the wall down which we climbed. The great shaft's mouth was now but a tiny ring of pale light far above. Continuing to feel our way, we moved down the ladder, until there came a sudden exclamation from Carson, below me, which halted Trent and me.

"The ladder!" he exclaimed. "I've come to its end, and it doesn't reach to the shaft's bottom!"

"The end!" I cried. "Can you see how far the shaft's floor is beneath it?"

"I can't even guess," he said. "This darkness is so thick, it may be one foot or a hundred. And we daren't wait here until the moon comes above the shaft and lights it, for then it will be too late for us to use the projector!"

WE hung silent there a moment, a silence akin to despair, clinging there to the ladder, hanging against the smooth wall of the great well whose depths extended for an unguessed distance into the utter darkness beneath us. Then Carson's voice came calmly up to us through that darkness.

"I'm going to let go," he said. "The shaft's bottom can't be but a little beneath us, and I'll take the chance."

Before we could cry to him to wait, the rope-ladder had twitched suddenly in my grip as he released his weight from it beneath me, and then the next moment had come a light thud, seemingly just beneath. And then, inexpressibly welcome to our strained ears, came the sound of Carson's voice.

"It's all right," he was saying. "The shaft's floor is only a few feet beneath the ladder's end!"

Swiftly I climbed downward, reached the last rung of the ladder's length in another moment, and then for an instant hung from that rung, hesitant. The darkness about me, impenetrable and enveloping, made the space beneath me seem an abyss, but I released my hold, shot downward, and in an instant had struck a hard, smooth floor not a half-dozen feet beneath me. I felt Carson beside me in the darkness, and in another moment there came another thud and Trent dropped down beside us. Then, joining hands so that we might not lose each other in the blackness there at the shaft's bottom, we waited for the coming of the light which would illuminate the shaft. Its mouth far above was a small circle of pale light in the blackness, and it was up toward that circle that we gazed as we waited. Moments passed thus, moments in which we were aware only of the smooth, hard floor upon which we stood, and then across the edge of the pale circle above there drifted slowly the shining disk of the full moon. As it did so, there poured down into the shaft, reflected downward by the metal walls with surprising strength, a flood of pale light which illuminated, in misty fashion, all things about us.

We were standing at the edge of the level metal floor of the mighty shaft, that floor being a great circle of the same diameter as the shaft's mouth. At the center of this metal floor, taking up almost half the shaft's bottom, the metal gave way to a tremendous disk of smooth black substance, shining, as Carson had said, like black glass which seemed inset in the floor. On the other side of this disk there were ranged along

the floor a regular row of some twenty mighty cylinders of metal, vague great shapes that gleamed dully in the misty light from above. Save for these and for the great black disk, there was nothing visible at the bottom of the great well. The disk glittered brilliantly even in the pale light that filtered down upon it, but there lay over all things else the thick dust of endless centuries.

Carson led the way at once toward the great cylinders ranged at the glittering disk's edge. A hundred feet in diameter each, three hundred in height, they loomed giant-like before us in the misty light. We seemed but three pygmies as we gazed up toward them. They stood upon a narrow, deep slot in the metal floor, perhaps six feet in width, and this slot led across the metal floor and across the black material of the disk to its center. The great cylinders themselves seemed quite without break in their gleaming walls, and to slide open their great tops as the moon raiders had done would be impossible for us. But as we walked around the nearest of them, Trent's quick eyes detected a stud set in its surface, and swiftly he pressed it. At once, smoothly and noiselessly, a square section of the great cylinder's curving wall slid upward, and we could see that that wall was a yard in thickness, formed of alternating layers of gleaming metal and gray insulating material, shielding its interior from the terrific cold of outer space.

Through the doorway we stepped, and found ourselves in the gigantic cylindrical chamber that was the cylinder's interior. But now we saw that its great flat top and flat bottom, and sections of its curving sides, were quite transparent from within, though opaque from without. At the center of the cylinder's floor stood the only object in it, a solid little pillar of metal bearing on its top a number of small studs. Carson pressed one of these studs experimentally, and the door through which we had entered clicked hermetically shut behind us. He touched another and the cylinder began to move, to slide smoothly and noiselessly along the slot above which it rested, until it had slid upon the black disk, stood at its center, covering almost all the disk's surface!

CARSON clicked open the door again, then pointed out through it. There at the great black disk's edge, rising from the metal floor but a few feet from the door of our cylinder that rested on that disk, stood another short pillar of metal, bearing on its top a small metal disk and a white-handled

heard, a humming that lasts for a moment before the beam drives upward. In that moment, after turning on the switch, I must leap back into the cylinder and click shut its door before the beam drives it upward through space."

"But when?" Trent asked. "How can we know at what exact moment to turn it on?"

"The moon raiders turned it on when the great bell-note sounded," Carson said, "so that bell-note must be the signal that sounds automatically here to mark the moment when the moon is directly overhead, when the beam must be loosed and the cylinder driven moonward!"

Gazing upward, we saw that the silver shield of the full moon was creeping almost across the center of the shaft's circular mouth far above, and Carson strode out to the pillar-switch beside the disk, while we stood at the one inside the cylinder, ready to snap shut the door when he should have turned the switch outside and leaped within. There were no other preparations to make, none that could be made. The great beam of light, which we knew must drive the cylinders out by means of light-pressure, intensified in some way, must drive them at almost the speed of light itself, we knew, and so if we succeeded, our cylinder would be hurled across the gulf from earth to moon within moments, seconds, the speed of light being some 186,300 miles a second and the approximate distance to the moon but 238,840 miles. If we made it, we knew we would make it in seconds, and so would have no need for air-supplies or other special equipment during the moments that we would flash outward.

If we made it! Yet it seemed incredible now, as we waited, that we could do so, that we could hurtle across the awful gulf toward the calmly shining disk above us. Gazing up toward that disk, waiting with taut nerves for the great bell-signal that would mark the moment when we must drive out toward it, Carson outside and Trent and I inside the cylinder regarded it with pounding hearts. I could make out upon that silver moon-disk the dark blotches of its seas, the *Mare Serenitatis* and the *Mare Nubium* and the rest, the brilliantly shining region about Tycho, toward the lower limb, and the more central dark circle of Copernicus' mighty crater. Within moments more the cylinder in which we stood would be driving out toward that shining sphere with all the pressure of the awful beam behind it. What was awaiting us there? Would our cylinder be shot unerringly upward and into a shaft like this on earth, that would in some way automatically cushion and halt our great flight, or would we crash in instantaneous death against the lunar crags? What strange cities of unhuman hordes awaited us, what hopeless search for our captured friend?

Tensely, silently, we waited, and I think now that those moments of waiting were the most terrible of all, those moments in which we waited for the signal that would send us flashing out with all the great beam's awful power and speed into that gulf, where never men had flashed before, into that great void of airless space between earth and moon. Nearer the moon's circle was creeping toward the center of the cylinder's transparent top, above us. Carson's hand was tightening on the great switch outside, the switch that we knew would be thrown automatically back again after our cylinder had been shot forth by the beam. My own hand was on the stud that closed the mighty cylinder's door, and tensely through that door I watched Carson outside. And nearer—still nearer—toward the center of the circle of pale light far above crept the shining moon. Creeping steadily westward still—nearer—nearer—

Clang!

The mighty note rang suddenly out from somewhere far beneath us, mighty, compelling, like the note of an inconceivably titanic bell, and at the same instant Carson snapped down upon the little metal disk's top, the white-handled lever in his grasp! There was a tremendous clear humming from beneath, and as it sounded, Carson leaped toward us, through the cylinder's door, which a moment later snapped shut as I pressed on the stud I held! Then the next moment blinding, dazzling light was stabbing up from beneath and all about us, a colossal ray of inconceivable brilliance that seemed to grip the cylinder, to stab upward with it in its grasp at velocity inconceivable, all things that we could see vanishing instantly from about us, save the moon's bright disk above. Our moment had come at last, and at almost the speed of light itself we were flashing out into the void of space toward that disk—out from earth to moon!

CHAPTER V

The Other Side of the Moon!

NEVER are the following moments more to me than a swift succession of lightning-like impressions. At the instant that the beam had shot upward with our cylinder, we had been pressed against the floor for a split-second with enormous force, and then that pressure had as instantly lessened. That instant of pressure passed almost unheeded by us,

"The switch that turns on the great beam!" Carson exclaimed

though, because at that terrific moment all was to us but a mighty blaze of brilliant light that flooded about our cylinder and through its transparent floor and windows as we flashed up and outward. Clinging to the central pillar on the cylinder's floor, Carson and Trent and I were aware for that first instant only of the blinding ray that had caught and flung us outward, and then in the next flashing moment I had seen the moon's bright sphere swiftly growing in the black heavens before us!

Thrilled through and through every atom of my body by the awful velocity at which we were racing through the void, brain whirling as we clung there to the pillar, I glanced back and below us, caught for an instant through the brilliance of the great beam the dark, dwindling shape of a brown sphere that I knew was earth, with to one side and beyond it the blazing disk of the sun, adorned with vast streamers of flame and blazing toward us through even the blinding brilliance of the great beam! Beyond and all about us, too, I had a momentary impression of thousands of stars, brilliant, terrible, burning with undimmed splendor there in the awful void through which the cylinder that carried us was leaping at almost the speed of light!

All of this, the wild flash outward with the great beam about us, my glance ahead and behind, all had taken but a moment of time, and then, even above the wild thrumming sound which our cylinder gave forth beneath the awful pressure of the beam, I heard a hoarse exclamation from Carson who clung there beside me, turned my gaze upward to see that even in that single moment that we had been flashing outward, the moon's great sphere had grown to giant proportions before us, filled now a third of the heavens, a half, two-thirds! A huge world it turned before us now, leaping closer and growing larger with inconceivable rapidity. I caught a glimpse of the vast dark upper plains of its great seas, the brilliance that flared toward us from about Tycho, the great towering ranges of the Carpathians and the Appenines, all growing enormous, with the passing of each fraction of a second that we hurtled toward them! Then straight before us, at the center almost of the great moon-disk that now filled all the heavens before us, I discerned a gigantic circular crater whose awful towering walls formed a colossal ring miles high and dozens of miles across, a giant jagged crater toward the center of which our cylinder at all its immense velocity was rocketing!

"Copernicus!" It was Carson, shouting in my ear in that mad moment. "We're going to smash inside Copernicus' crater!"

Even as Carson cried out there beside me, the jagged floor of the mighty crater seemed to be rushing lightning-like toward us, all the brilliant, bare and savage outlines of its rocky surface photographed upon my brain in that instant, and then the crater's floor was full before us, looming like a giant wall before us as the cylinder rushed at its awful speed toward it! I knew it was the end; in that wild moment, we seemed to cling there and stare fascinated toward it in that instant that we rushed to death. And then, in the brilliant-lit rocky floor of the great crater just before us, in that giant wall across our path, a tiny black dot had appeared, a dot that in even the fraction of a second that I had caught it, had grown swiftly to a great black circle, the opening of a great shaft in the crater's floor, a shaft whose black mouth loomed for an instant full before our flashing cylinder, and then into which our cylinder had hurtled, and into the dark depths of which we were racing on at the same terrific speed!

On—on—it could hardly have been for more than a moment that we flashed on through the great shaft's dark stygian depths, with our great driving beam brilliant still beside and behind us, yet that moment seemed to us to be a time of unmeasured length. The thought flashed across my spinning brain as I clung there, that we were speeding into the very bowels of the moon, on through that great shaft. I had a lightning-like vision of tremendous, rocky, cavern-like spaces through which we clicked like light, spaces illumined for that split instant by the brilliance of our great driving beam, and then seemed to see before us, across the shaft, a great metal barrier which with the speed of light itself split open before us and closed shut behind us. Then I was aware simultaneously of a point of brilliant light in the darkness ahead, a point that even as I saw it had grown and seemed to rush toward us with a speed as great as our own, a giant beam of brilliant light-force like that which drove us on, and which in the next instant had met our flashing cylinders, blinding us completely for an instant by the dazzling glare from the great beams ahead and behind!

Then we were aware suddenly that the cylinder was slowing with unbelievable quickness and yet smoothly and noiselessly, was slowing as the beam that drove us forward was opposed and balanced by the beam that drove toward us from ahead! The brilliance about us was lessening swiftly, and as we opened our eyes and looked forward, we saw that the cylinder was gradually decreasing its terrible speed; we could see another point of white light ahead, a soft white light utterly unlike the brilliant beams. Toward that point the cylinder swept smoothly, and then as the point loomed and grew before us, the cylinder had plunged suddenly up from the shaft into it, up from the shaft's dark depths into a great space lit with soft white light! We saw before us a great black-glittering disk, set above us, that seemed very familiar in appearance, saw a great framework of metal girders set beneath that disk, which seemed imbedded in the great room's ceiling. Then the cylinder had swept up into that framework and had halted against the disk. There was a great clicking of metal from the framework about us, and our cylinder hung motionless, suspended beneath the disk. Our terrific journey was ended!

CARSON was the first to stagger to his feet. Half consciously, I heard his voice, and then Trent and I released our grip upon the pillar's metal hand-holds to which we had clung, and staggered up beside him. He was gazing eagerly through the transparent sections of the cylinder's sides, and now as we gazed out with him, we saw that the cylinder hung in that great metal framework from the ceiling of a great chamber of vast proportions. That chamber, cube-like and with sides and floor and ceiling of metal, was more than a thousand feet wide and long, and was lit by circles of soft light inset here and there in walls and ceiling. At the center of its floor there yawned the black circular opening of the great shaft up which we had come, and above which the cylinder now hung. Just above that shaft, and above our cylinder, was inset in the chamber's ceiling the great black-glittering disk we had been watching, and beneath which our cylinder was suspended.

I knew it had taken us only moments to flash across that titanic gulf through which we had come, though our swift-succeeding and unforgettable impressions in those lightning-like moments had made it seem much longer. I remembered now, though, as with Carson and Trent I gazed forth in awe, that when we had first flashed into that great shaft in the moon's side, in Copernicus' crater, we had seemed to be driving straight forward, but that when we had shot up into this soft-lit chamber, we had seemed to rise straight upward. It came to me, though, that our direction was the same but that our

sense of direction had changed as we had reached the moon and our terrific speed had lessened at the great shaft's end. Nor did I doubt longer the way in which our awful velocity had been lessened and halted so swiftly, knowing that our cylinder's approach had somehow automatically turned on an opposing beam from the black disk before us, which had swiftly neutralized the drive of our own outward beam and had slowed and halted us here. These things, though, flashing across my mind as they did, were yet nothing to it at that moment, beside the intent interest that held us as we gazed eagerly forth from our cylinder, through the transparent sections of its sides.

"Cylinders!" Carson was exclaiming. "Cylinders like this one—and in hundreds!"

We turned to the place from which he was gazing, and then saw that at that side of the vast chamber in which our cylinder hung, there was a great corridor or passage-way opening from its wall, and that in that mighty passage stood a great row of huge cylinders like our own, a row that led directly to the framework of metal in which our own hung. It was apparent that these could be moved forward at will into that framework, and shot by the disk through the great shaft to our earth, and as I saw that, a sudden chill passed over me, a wave of fear that was not for myself, but for my world. With these cylinders massed here, extending back into that great corridor in unguessed hundreds, thousands, perhaps, what great invasion of earth did not their silent presence here portend? I had a momentary vision of them flashing down to earth from the disk above us, hundreds, thousands of them, filled with tens of thousands of the great flying-circles, and a countless horde of the monstrous creatures who had gathered them here!

But that swift vision passed from me in the excitement of the next moment, for Trent was pointing now to a narrow little metal bridge that led from our cylinder's door to the floor of the room, and to the edge of the circular abyss above which we hung. We could see at the great room's far end, too, a metal stair that led steeply upward, and afire with eagerness gazed out toward it. I think that in that moment we all believed ourselves somewhere in the moon's interior, since there was no natural light about us, only the soft glow of the inset circles. We knew, too, that in the moments before our cylinder had halted, it had flashed for a great distance into the moon's heart through the great shaft, and now were eager to discover our whereabouts. I turned swiftly to Carson.

"There must be air in this great room!" I cried to him. "For this must be where the moon raiders left their cylinder!"

He gazed doubtfully forth. "If there were air here it would rush down that shaft," he objected, "out through it into the void of airless space—instantly."

I shook my head. "Didn't you see the great metal barrier or door across the shaft, that split open before our cylinder and closed behind us as we flashed on?" I asked. "That must have been a great gate or valve that opened automatically at our coming, and closed behind us, a valve that keeps the air here from rushing out as you say."

HE gazed forth a moment still, perplexed, then silently nodded and turned toward the door-stud. As he placed his hand upon it, we waited tensely, silently, for we knew that if there were no air outside, or if there was but air of great rarity, we would die within the next few moments. But Carson pressed the stud without hesitation, and as the great door clicked upward in the cylinder's side we stood motionless. As there came no rush of air either outward or inward, we turned, gazed at each other with eyes alight, then turned toward the door. A moment later, holding to the cylinder's side so that our efforts might not send us soaring upward by reason of the moon's weaker gravitational power, we stepped out upon the little bridge outside, the air without seeming exactly like that within. But as we stepped out, we stopped short on the bridge, astounded.

For the steps we had taken had been the same as though taken on earth! Knowing that because of its smaller mass and weaker gravitational power that our weight should be but one-sixth its normal figure on the moon, we had expected from the first plans of our trip to have to overcome this disadvantage. Had half-expected, even, that the sudden and great change in gravity would prove our deaths at once, since such a change might be expected to have fatal results upon the body's internal organs. We had counted upon taking that chance, though, had braced ourselves as we made our first moves outward from the cylinder against the weaker gravitation we supposed to exist, and now we had found that that gravitation, apparently, was exactly the same as on earth!

"The gravity!" Carson was exclaiming, startled more than by anything that had gone before, as we all were. "It's the same as on earth—yet it's impossible!"

A thought flashed across my brain. "The moon raiders!" I cried. "You remember you said when they came to earth they walked about on it as though quite used to its gravitational power!"

Carson nodded quickly. "They did," he said. "And we know the reason for it now. Yet how can the moon's gravity be the same? It's against every law of science!"

But now, even though stunned by the inexplicable equality of the moon's gravity with that of earth, we were gazing eagerly about us. The steep metal stair we had caught sight of from the cylinder lay before us, and as we looked upward we saw that it led up to the great chamber's ceiling, and further upward and outward through a great circular opening in that ceiling, an opening through which we could see a vast, dim-lit space above, a gleaming far above it that puzzled us. Without words, moving like men in a dream, we strode to that stair, were climbing up its steep slant, up and up until we were almost to the opening, could see more of the mighty space above, could hear a faint sound of throbbing that was beating in our ears from somewhere above, and that came and went.

Hearts pounding, we slowed our upward climb now, moving more stealthily toward the opening just above. As we neared it we saw, set at the edge of that opening, a short metal pillar, which seemed familiar in appearance. Carson pointed to it, whispering, "The switch of the great disk on the moon!" I nodded. It was a duplicate of the switch on earth; a small metal disk mounted on the pillar with a white-handled lever swinging at its edge. But this lever, I noticed, could be swung not only to the metal disk's lower side, to send the great beam driving downward, down through the great shaft to earth, but could be swung to the metal disk's upper side, too. Could it be that the great beam here could be driven upward, too, from the disk's upper side? Only momentary was the wonder that flashed across my brain, as we stole upward past the great switch, for none of us dreamed, then, of the cataclysmic thing that was to take place upon these steps, at that great switch which we passed unheedingly.

Upward we crept, Carson ahead, Trent and I just below him, and then as his head came above the last step, as he peered forth into the great space above, gazed about and upward, I saw a look of awe come on his face, awe and amazement inexpressible, as though his eyes gazed upon something which his brain refused

to credit. Staring forth, it was as though for the moment he had forgotten the existence of Trent and myself, and we glanced toward each other, and continued to creep silently after him. We reached him, raised our eyes carefully above the level of the last step, above the edge of the great opening in the big chamber's ceiling. Then, as our eyes too took in what lay about and above us, we too were stunned into unbelieving silence.

We were gazing out into a great space whose very dimensions and existence were incredible to us, a far-reaching vault of space that extended, lit with soft white light, as far as the eye could see. The first thing about it which caught and held our eyes was that which lay above it, a great vault of blackness, of night, in which burned the familiar stars, yet which seemed closed out from the space about us by a barrier that we could scarcely realize, a gleaming yet transparent material that stretched far away, over all the great space about us, and that was only visible by reason of the light dimly reflected upon it from beneath! A titanic, unbelievable transparent roof, stretching away as far as the eye could reach, miles above the great space that surrounded us, closing in that space from the blackness of the outer night and from the burning stars!

OUR dazed eyes, moving from that gigantic transparent roof to the vista about us, we saw that there stretched away in all directions to the horizons a smooth level plain, a great plain that was covered as far as the eye could reach by buildings! Buildings of metal, buildings like none that man had ever looked upon before, surely; buildings that towered for thousands of feet, many of them, through the dusk toward the transparent roof far above! Buildings that were many-sided, angle polyhedrons, that were like great faceted diamonds of metal, that were like giant metal crystals ranged in rows and streets! In their angled, faceted sides were set circles of soft glowing white light, light that changed this lunar city's night into a dim, twilight dusk.

And that strange, great city swarmed with life! For here and there across and above it there flitted smoothly in ceaseless swarms scores and hundreds of great flat circles, throbbing from building-roof to roof, circles upon which we could see dark figures. Figures erect and bulbous, their bodies cased in shells, their short limbs ending in webbed and taloned paws, their great heads reptilian and tapering, borne on snake-like necks! Turtle-figures, turtle-men like those who had raided down to earth in one of their great cylinders on the mighty beam, and into whose city we had won, at last, in our search for Howland! Far away reached the crystal-like buildings of that city, the streets between them swarming too with turtle-creatures, but in the mass of those buildings lay a great central plaza, or circular clearing, in which was the great opening through which we gazed. And set in the metal floor beside our opening, we saw, was the black-glittering upper surface of the great disk, the disk whose lower surface was set in the ceiling of the great chamber beneath us. Could it be, then, I asked myself, that my inference on seeing the switch had been right, and that the giant beam was shot upward from this great disk's upper side also? But that was but a passing thought across the stunned awe that filled us now as we gazed forth.

"The city of the moon creatures," Carson was whispering, as we gazed out. "The city of the moon creatures, and it is here where we never dreamed that it might be—on the other side of the moon!"

The other side of the moon! For we saw now, knew now, that it was there that this city about us lay, it was there that we now stood. Our great cylinder, flashing into the mouth of the great shaft there in the crater of Copernicus, had rushed on at its titanic speed through the moon's depths, not halting in those cavernous depths as we had thought it might, but going on through the moon itself, to its other side! Flashing on to this other side that never had been seen by anyone on earth, turned always away from earth as it was, and that yet held upon its surface this giant, transparent-roofed city, whose masses of colossal angled buildings, held within it the unguessed-myriads of the turtle-creatures' hordes, stretched all about us as far as the eye could reach! For it was here that the moon creatures had existed—for how many ages?—unsuspected by any on earth. They had pierced their great shaft down from this side through the very center of the cold moon itself, down and out the moon's earthward side, so that their cylinders might be driven by the great disk's beam down and out that shaft, through the moon and across the gulf to earth, just as our cylinder from earth had been driven lightning-like out toward the moon's earthward side and through the great shaft there to this other side, straight through the moon!

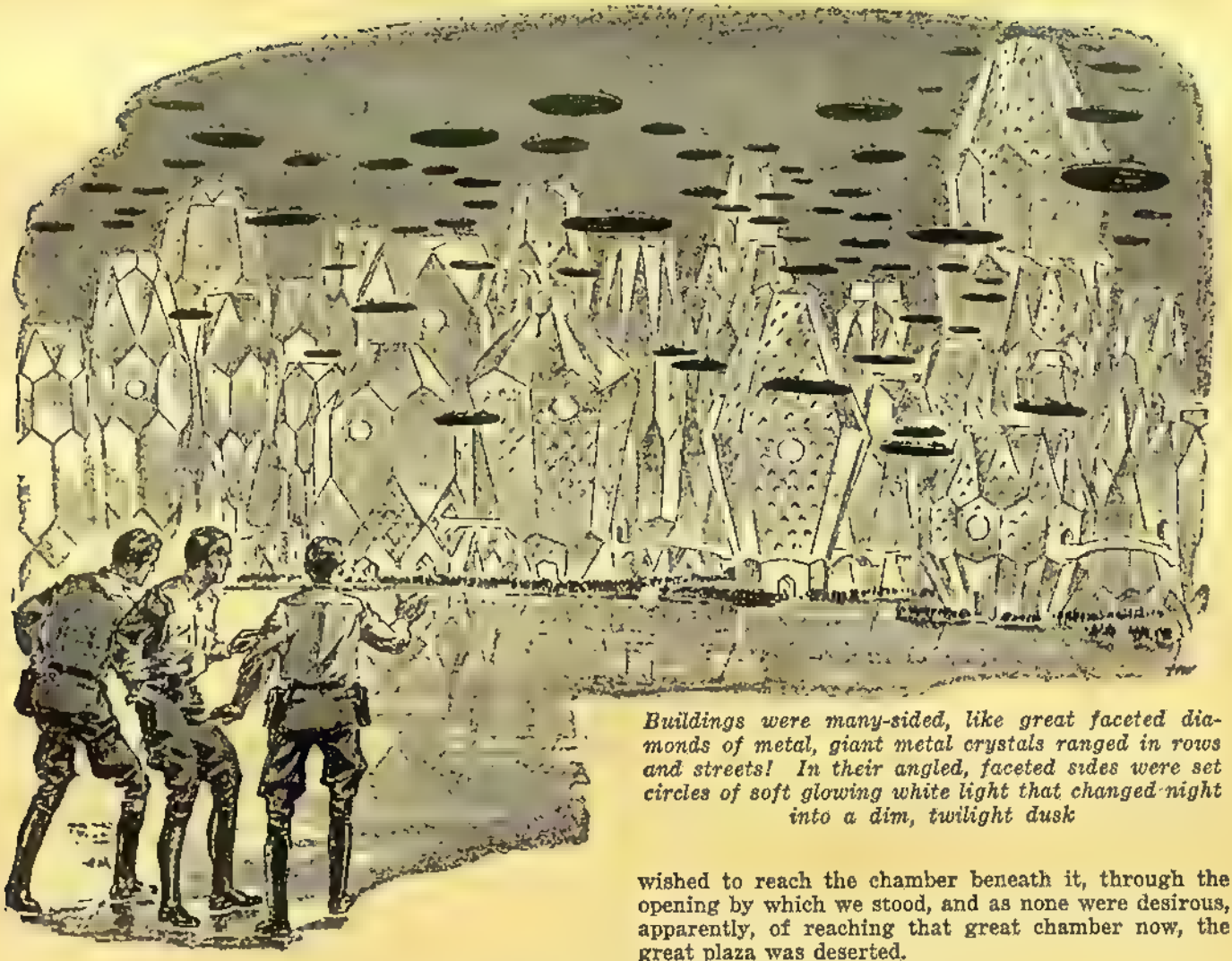
And in this mighty city about us, this great turtle-city that lay now beneath the darkness of the moon night, two weeks long, even as the moon's earthward side lay in the lunar day of two weeks, the moon-creatures could change their night to dusk, at least, lighting it by their great glowing circles inset in their buildings. Shielding it from the awful cold of space, from the airless void, by the giant transparent roof far above it, which we knew must cover all the moon's far side, a great air-tight shield which made existence here in their city possible by means of an artificial air supply. For well we knew that without that shield above it the air about us would rush forth into the void instantly and leave this far side of the moon as dead and cold and barren as the earthward side! Here in their great shielded, air-tight city on the moon's one side dwelt the turtle-hordes, yet why had they built this city upon one side alone, upon the side never seen by earth?

BEFORE my whirling brain could suggest any explanation of this, though, Carson had gazed about, had drawn himself up through the opening to stand upon the surface of the great plaza itself. No turtle-shapes could we see through the dusk upon all that great clearing, though in the city's streets that we could glimpse through the dusk we could see great masses of the turtle-creatures moving busily to and fro, hordes of flying-circles that throbbed to and fro over the city and from building to building. Standing there in that strange soft dusk, shielded by it from the eyes of the turtle-creatures in the city about us, whom our own earth-sharpened eyes, accustomed to the deeper natural night of earth, could easily make out, we paused. Gazing with awe about us, at the giant shapes of the great buildings looming in the dusk all around and beyond us, we came back suddenly to realization of our own purpose as Carson turned toward us.

"Now is our best chance to search for Howland in this lunar city!" he exclaimed. "For with this dusk lying over it we have a chance to evade the turtle-creatures for a time, at least, to escape discovery long enough to find some trace of Howland!"

"But where would they take him?" asked Trent. "This city must stretch over all the moon's far side, and how can we find him in it?"

"It's our one chance to do so, in this dusk of the lunar night!" Carson declared. "Twenty-four hours from now earth will have revolved again, so that its shaft there in Yucatan will be in line with this shaft down through the moon, and when that occurs we must



Buildings were many-sided, like great faceted diamonds of metal, giant metal crystals ranged in rows and streets! In their angled, faceted sides were set circles of soft glowing white light that changed night into a dim, twilight dusk

go back—back to warn our world. But during those twenty-four hours there is a chance, a million to one chance, I admit, that we may be able to find Howland here, to escape discovery by these swarming turtle-creatures, and to take him back with us!"

"But to venture into this city around us—these streets crowded with turtle-creatures—is death!" I exclaimed. "Even now it is a miracle, that even through this dusk we haven't been discovered on the plaza, at the city's center!"

"We must risk it," Carson said. "Some of the streets in the city around us, you can see, are hardly used by the turtle-creatures, while others are swarming with them. Well, if we can make our way through these comparatively deserted streets, in this dusk, we can perhaps evade the turtle-creatures long enough to find some clue to Howland's fate."

Gazing about us again, straining our eyes through the dusk across the great plaza's surface, we could see that Carson was right and that some of the narrow streets that branched from that plaza were almost empty of turtle-creatures, while the other and broader ones were filled with masses of them, apparently most of them carrying with them tools or instruments of one sort or another. All this we could only perceive as through a misty screen, through the dusk that lay unchangingly over all this lunar city. Yet we were puzzled by the fact, thankful as we were for it, that no turtle-creatures moved upon or across the great plaza at whose center we stood. It was evident, to us, after a moment's thought, that only those came out on the plaza who wished to reach the chamber beneath it, through the opening by which we stood, and as none were desirous, apparently, of reaching that great chamber now, the great plaza was deserted.

Pausing there, peering about, we stood for only a moment longer, and then Carson, with a silent gesture, was leading the way across the plaza, through the soft thick dusk toward its edge, toward one of the narrow and almost empty streets that branched from that edge. Before us as we moved on, hearts beating rapidly with every step, the gigantic crystal-like building loomed larger, and to our ears came louder the sounds of activity from the thronged broader streets, the deep bass note of many turtle-voices, the throbbing of many flying-circles that sped past in the dusk high overhead. Even through the shrouding dusk it seemed impossible that we could move nearer toward the great buildings without being discovered, but Carson was leading the way straight toward one of the narrower and emptier streets, a mere crevice between the great towering metal buildings, and once we reached its deeper shadow we might elude the creatures without great trouble, I knew. On we crept through the dusk toward it, then suddenly flung ourselves flat, as a flying-circle throbbing by overhead dipped suddenly close toward us!

Lying there with pounding heart, it seemed impossible that we had not been seen by those on it, but in a moment it had passed, and with the next moment we were up again, moving on through the dusk toward the deeper dusk of the narrow chasm-like street that opened through the looming buildings before us. We were almost at that opening now, but a few yards from its welcome deeper shadow. We were within yards, feet of it, of the great plaza's edge, when we stopped abruptly and recoiled! For into that narrow opening just before us, from one of the great buildings beside it, had emerged a dozen or more dark, upright forms conversing.

in deep bass tones that came clearly to us through the dusk, and moving straight toward the great plaza's center and ourselves! Dark, bulbous turtle-forms, who, before Carson and Trent ahead or I behind could leap back, were within yards of us. Grotesque great shell-cased creatures who stopped short as they caught sight of us, stared toward us for a moment with lidless eyes, and then were rushing forward upon us!

CHAPTER VI

The Battle of the Flying-Circles

AS the dozen or more great turtle-creatures ahead rushed toward us, I seemed to stand for a moment in a stunned paralysis of inaction, then saw Carson's automatic leap from its holster, heard the swift crack of it and saw two of those onrushing creatures stumble and fall, saw another collapse as Trent's gun spoke in his hand. My own pistol was now in my grasp, and I was leaping forward, hearing from all about the great plaza and all across the giant city a sudden wave of sounds of alarm. But before I had leaped more than a step forward, Carson had cried out to me over his shoulder.

"Back, Foster!" he cried. "They've got us, but you can get away! It's the only chance now for Howland and us—for one to stay free!"

Even in that agonized moment, as the great turtle-creatures rushed forward unchecked upon Carson and Trent ahead, I knew that Carson's cry was truth, that if we all were captured there would be no chance, but that one free might save the rest, might escape back from moon to earth to warn our world, at least. I stood hesitant for an instant, pistol in hand, torn by my desire to rush forward beside my two friends, and then had turned, and was running backward through the dusk across the great clear plaza's surface, back toward the opening in it up through which we had come. Behind me I heard the crack of the automatics of Carson and Trent suddenly cease, heard a quick scuffling, a babel of deep-toned cries and hoarse shouts, and knew that the moon-creatures had rounded up my friends. From all around the great plaza it seemed that other moon-creatures were pouring forth from the mighty buildings in answer to the alarm, and at top speed I ran on through the dusk toward the great opening through which we had come.

A moment more and I was at that opening, but now I could discern, far across the plaza through the thick dusk, a half-score of great turtle-forms that were running toward it! They had not as yet caught sight of me, I knew, but as I flung myself down the metal stair into the great cube-chamber where our cylinder still hung suspended above the abyss of the great shaft, I knew that within minutes they would reach that chamber. Frantically I gazed about for some place of concealment, but in the great, metal-walled and white-lit room there seemed none. I jumped to the bridge that led to the open door of the suspended cylinder, some wild idea of hiding in that cylinder flashing across my mind, but as I reached the bridge I stopped, gazing up at the mighty metal girders about the great cylinder, which supported it there, beneath the disk and above the shaft's circular abyss. Two of those giant girders crossed at right-angles just above me, and in the next moment I was clambering upon them, lying along the horizontal one and praying that its broad surface might shield me from the gaze of any one beneath. Hardly had I reached that precarious place of concealment, the dark mouth of the bottomless shaft down beneath me, when there burst into the great room from above a group of a dozen turtle-creatures!

All, I saw, were armed with half-hemispheres of metal like those Carson had described to us, containers of the deadly green vacuum ray, and I held my breath as they burst down the stair, calling to each other in deep tones and gazing eagerly about the room. None looked up toward the great girder on which I lay prone, and they seemed reassured by the emptiness of the great place. For a few moments they conversed in their strange vibrant tones, glancing about them, a dozen inconceivably strange great shelled turtle-creatures, and then as one of them glanced toward the cylinder that hung suspended beside me he uttered something and all moved toward it, to cross the bridge just beneath me.

As they came across that bridge, halting beside the cylinder's open door and peering within with hemispheres ready, I could have reached down my arm and touched the tops of their great reptilian heads, so close were they beneath me. I hardly dared breathe; I lay with muscles tense, yet with an intolerable desire to shout aloud, as they conversed there for a moment more, inches only beneath the great girder on which I lay. Then my tension relaxed as they turned to go. Hope rising in me again, I saw them turning to go across the great chamber and up the narrow stair, but then saw to my dismay that one of them had remained there in the big room, one who held his vacuum-ray hemisphere still in his grasp and who was obviously a sentinel left on guard! Despair rushed across me again as I saw the others leaving, passing up the stair and out the great opening into the plaza above, while the single one remaining paced about with lidless eyes alert, as watchful as ever.

A MYRIAD plans of escape flashed through my brain as I lay there, yet all seemed hopeless while that guard remained beneath me. At any moment I might be discovered by him, I knew, and then a flash of the deadly green ray would put an end to my existence before I could make a move. Yet somewhere in the mighty city about me, living or dead, were my two friends who were willing to sacrifice themselves to allow me to escape, and I knew that unless I could win free and find Carson and Trent soon, and with them make our search for Howland, the twenty-four hours, at the end of which we must flash back to warn earth, would be gone. Racking my brains for some expedient, I finally chose the most desperate, for I dared not make use of my pistol. It was a slim chance, to be sure, but putting my idea into operation, I reached forth and rapped sharply upon the side of the giant metal cylinder suspended beside the girder on which I lay.

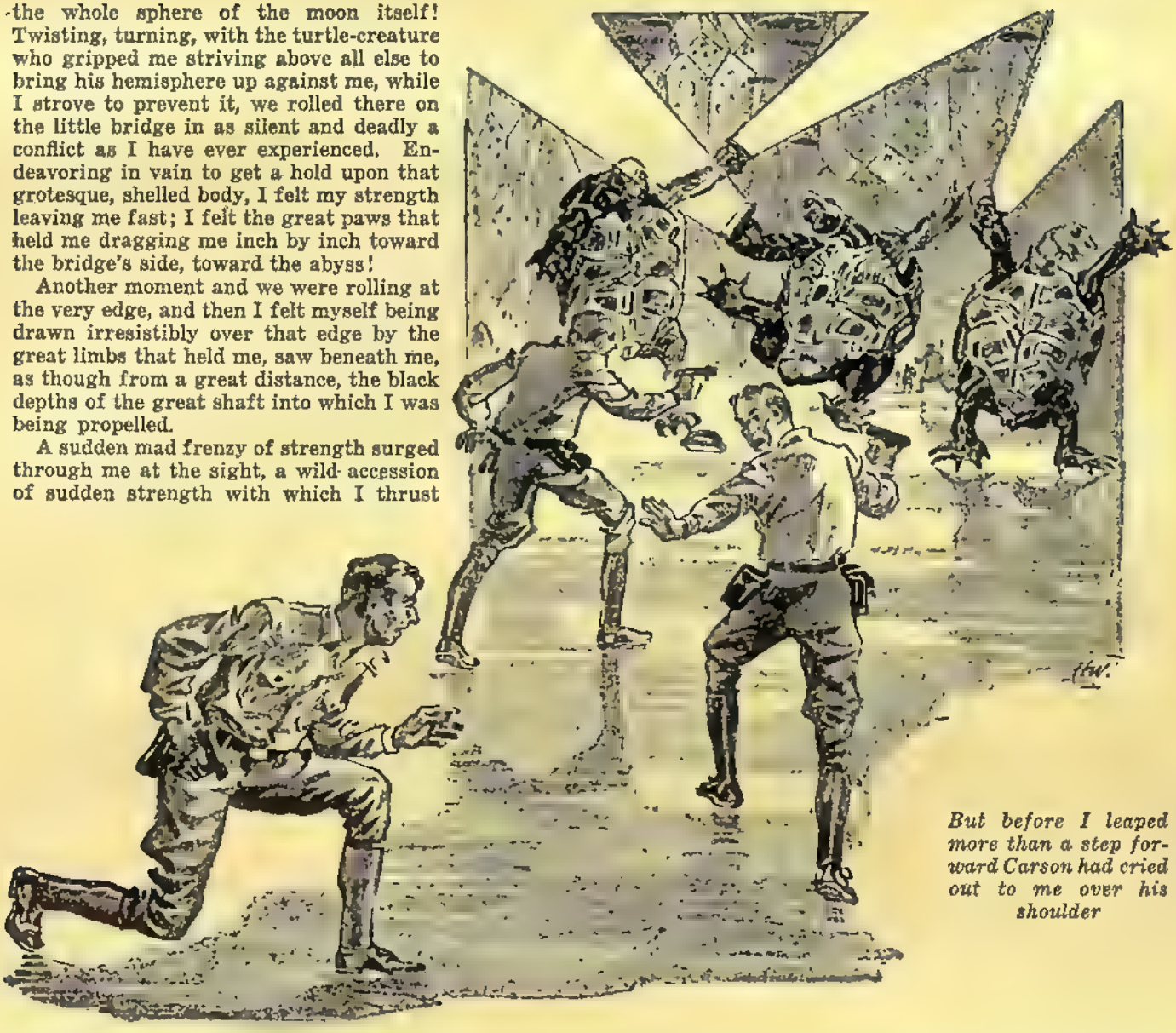
As the resonant sound of my rapping broke the stillness of the great chamber I saw the turtle-guard, at the other end of the great room, turn instantly, with hemisphere upraised, gazing toward the cylinder. Then quickly he was coming across the great floor toward it, toward the little bridge of metal that jutted out from the great shaft's edge to the cylinder's open door. He came slower as he reached that bridge, standing there at the very edge of the abyss and gazing forward into the cylinder with ray-container still ready for action. Silently I gathered myself, and then as he stepped just beneath the great girder on which I was, I threw myself down upon him!

Even as I had leaped down upon him the sound of that leap had brought his deadly hemisphere flashing up toward me, but he was a moment too late, for in the next instant I was upon him, had crumpled him down to the surface of the little bridge, and we were struggling madly upon it. Gripping each other with the utmost of our powers, we struggled there upon that narrow little strip of metal and beneath us was the unfathomable depths of the great shaft that led down through

the whole sphere of the moon itself! Twisting, turning, with the turtle-creature who gripped me striving above all else to bring his hemisphere up against me, while I strove to prevent it, we rolled there on the little bridge in as silent and deadly a conflict as I have ever experienced. Endeavoring in vain to get a hold upon that grotesque, shelled body, I felt my strength leaving me fast; I felt the great paws that held me dragging me inch by inch toward the bridge's side, toward the abyss!

Another moment and we were rolling at the very edge, and then I felt myself being drawn irresistibly over that edge by the great limbs that held me, saw beneath me, as though from a great distance, the black depths of the great shaft into which I was being propelled.

A sudden mad frenzy of strength surged through me at the sight, a wild accession of sudden strength with which I thrust



But before I leaped more than a step forward Carson had cried out to me over his shoulder

blindly out at the monster who held me. That fierce thrust, unexpected as it was to him, knocked him suddenly away from me, to the very edge of the bridge, and then he was toppling over that edge, hurtling down into the great shaft's depths. A deep wailing cry came up to me for a moment, and then all was silence!

I stumbled to my feet, across the bridge and to the solid metal floor of the great chamber, toward the stair that led upward. But before I had taken a half-dozen steps I stopped once more and gazed upward. From above had come a growing throbbing sound, a throbbing that was rapidly increasing in intensity, that was nearing me! Only an instant I heard it and then saw, through the great round opening in the big room's ceiling, a dark circle that was coming down toward that opening from high above through the dusk. It was one of the great flying-circles, and it was coming straight down toward the opening above me, straight down toward the great chamber in which I stood!

Spellbound with horror I stood there for a moment as the great dark shape swept downward, and in that moment it had reached the great opening in the ceiling, was floating smoothly down through it. But as it did so I had turned, had leaped backward. I knew even in that moment of deadly peril that I had no time to reach my former place of concealment on the girder, that I would be seen before ever I could reach it. The great suspended cylinder lay before me, its open door just across the little bridge on which I had battled, but neither could I take refuge in it, and for an instant I stood in an agony of indecision. Then even as the great flying-circle shot down into the big chamber I had made my decision, had leaped to the edge of the great shaft before me and had lowered myself swiftly over that edge, hanging from the rim of the abyss with all its terrific depths beneath me, and with only my fingers now visible on the rim to which I clung!

EVEN as I had lowered myself into that desperate place of concealment, I had heard the great flying-circle sweep down through the opening above, to the great chamber's metal floor, coming to rest there with its throbbing of power ceasing. I heard the deep vibrant voices of turtle-creatures then, many of them by the sound, as they emerged from the flying circle to the room's floor, and I prayed that they might not see my clutching fingers there on the great shaft's rim, since a slight push would send me hurtling down into the awful depths beneath me after my late antagonist. The creatures above seemed to halt upon emerging from the flying-circle, and I heard one passing across the narrow little bridge to my right, peering into the cylinder, apparently, and then returning without having seen my

clinging shape in the shadows of the great shaft's depths. But now my hands seemed going numb with the strain of holding me there from the shaft's rim, and I felt my grip upon that rim slowly slipping!

There was an agonized moment in which the turtle-creatures above conversed in their deep tones, while my grip continued to relax in spite of all the efforts of my will. I knew that a moment more would mark the limit of my endurance, would see me hurtling downward, but as I gave up all hope, I heard the sound of heavy footsteps on the metal floor above, and I knew that the turtle-creatures were moving around the great shaft to the room's opposite side, were passing apparently back into that great corridor which opened from it and in which the long row of cylinders was ranged. Hardly had the sound of their voices receded into that corridor than I was endeavoring to pull myself up over the rim from which I hung. For a moment my numbed muscles refused to obey the commands of my will, my aching limbs seeming incapable of further effort, and panic shot through me as I found myself unable to draw myself up. That very panic, though, served to spur me to a greater effort, and at last with a wild convulsion of my muscles, I had scrambled up over the great shaft's side and lay panting beside its edge.

For a while I lay there in utter exhaustion, then staggered to my feet. The great flying-circle of the turtle-creatures lay on the big room's metal floor not far from me, but none of the creatures themselves were in sight, all having passed into the corridor on the other side, from which still came the faint vibrations of their voices. I sprang across the room, toward the stair that led upward, but at the foot of that stair I halted, gazing back toward the silent flying-circle, a sudden thought occurring to me. Could I but operate that flying-circle it would enable me to make a survey of the great moon city, which I could accomplish in no other way. Afire with the idea, I leaped back toward the great craft.

It was simply a great flat circle of smooth metal, a low retaining wall of metal perhaps a foot high around its edge. The circle, like all the others I had seen, was fully a hundred feet in diameter, and at its center was the mechanism by which it was propelled. This mechanism, whatever its nature, was cased in a low flat cylinder or raised circle, upon the top of which was a bewildering series of studs, and oddly-charactered dials, all grouped about a single central upright lever or handle. I flung myself down beside this switch-cylinder, pressed swiftly upon the studs in turn, but without result. The voices of the moon-creatures, back in the great corridor, seemed nearer, louder, now, and I knew that they were returning, would in a moment more be emerging into the great chamber, so frantically I pressed and twisted at the studs before me. Then as my fingers fell upon the studs in a certain order, something clicked beneath them and there came instantly a smooth, powerful throbbing from the circle's mechanism. At once I grasped the central handle, and as I did so, felt the circle rising smoothly up from the floor toward the ceiling, a section of the circle at the center being transparent for downward vision.

A moment's experiment showed me that the central handle was the one control of the circle's direction, the great disk veering to whichever side that handle was inclined, descending when it was pressed downward and rising when it was pulled upward. Clumsily I guided it up toward the great opening in the ceiling, maneuvered for an instant beneath that opening, and then had risen up through it, my great circle throbbing smoothly upward into the dusk above the great moon city! All about me there stretched into the thickening twilight that seemed never to change the great masses of the strange faceted buildings, seeming as I soared up above them like giant crystals of metal, angled and regular-sided, cast down into geometric, neat formations. I could glimpse through the dusk many other flying-circles that were coming and going from roof to roof of the great buildings, but for the moment paid these small attention, sending my own circle soaring across the great plaza beneath me to the spot where I had last seen Carson and Trent.

AS I reached that spot, I halted the circle's progress, hanging motionless a few hundred feet above the plaza's smooth surface and gazing down toward it. Nothing lay beneath me, though, but the smooth metal, stretching away to the great buildings at the plaza's edge. There was no sign of Carson or Trent beneath, no loitering turtle-creatures, even, and it was with heart sick with despair that I gazed about on every side in search of them. Nowhere were they to be seen, no shapes were moving across the great plaza, though masses of the turtle-shapes moved in the streets of the city about me, and swarming circles throbbed by all about me in the dusk of the lunar city's night.

Despairingly I stared around, for where in this mighty, dim-lit city could I hope to find my friends? The proverbial needle and haystack seemed easy beside my own problem, but I knew that never could I rest until I had discovered my friends' fate. I had seen no bodies or blood stains below, so it seemed logical to hope that they still lived. Grasping the control of my flying-circle again, I sent it slanting up above the great city again, out now over its strange massed buildings and swarming streets at a height of a hundred feet or so, peering down through the dusk at buildings and streets for some trace of my missing friends. Nothing could I see of them, nothing but the giant buildings, inset circles of glowing light and small triangular windows alternating in their sides, the metal streets below in which the hordes of the turtle-creatures surged with their never-ceasing gathering of instruments and materials, their great preparations that seemed never to end. Down among the buildings I slanted now and then, hanging beside their small triangular windows and peering inside, but the darkness of their interiors baffled me, made me slant upward again.

I continued to drive across the city, peering down into it with the hopelessness of my search growing more and more complete. From the turtle-creatures who moved in masses below me I had no fear of discovery, but the flying-circles that swarmed thick about me, I twisted and turned unceasingly to avoid, knowing that if those creatures on them discovered my human form through the dusk, it would mean the end. But the turtle-creatures on those swarming circles ignored me.

The city, I could see now, stretched from horizon to horizon, covering all the moon's far side, without a break. Long before the great plaza and its opening had vanished in the dusk behind me, but still far above I could see the faint gleaming of the mighty transparent roof which shielded this air-tight lunar metropolis from the airless void of space. Through that roof, and through the dusk beneath it, I could make out the familiar stars, the great constellations unchanged in form or position, and the sight sent a poignant earth-sickness sweeping through me for an instant. Then I snapped back to sudden attention, fear stabbing me in the next instant, for a great flying-circle which I had not seen approaching had swept only a score of feet above me!

I turned, saw it soaring on a little distance behind me, then saw that it had stopped, turned, and was coming back toward me. The turtle-creatures on it had seen me! Straight toward me it was flying, but in the next instant I had grasped the control of my own circle, had sent it zooming upward, throbbing with power, up over

the city at a greater height and away from the following circle. Upward I shot steeply, clinging to the circle's center, and then as I glanced back saw that the other circle was following, was slanting up after me with the dozen turtle-creatures upon its surface plainly visible to me, gazing toward me as their craft shot up on my track. They were pursuing me!

Something of panic filled me as I realized the fact, but I gripped myself, sent the flying-circle on which I crouched slanting higher, higher until the city beneath was fading from sight in the thick dusk. Yet the pursuing craft came on, and because its drivers could maneuver it more skillfully than I, was rapidly overtaking me! Up and outward, up until the great massed buildings beneath had passed completely from sight in the dusk, pursued and pursuing circle fled, my heart racing as the gap between us steadily lessened. It had been my hope to lose the pursuing craft in the dusk, but turn and twist as I might, I could not shake them off, and rapidly they were drawing within yards of me. I could now see the gleam of the gigantic transparent roof, not far above, and knew that in my flight I had risen far above the moon city, was almost against the great roof. Then, just as I turned to glance back again toward the pursuing circle close behind me, I saw a great ray of misty green light, driving straight toward me, from a large hemisphere set at that circle's edge.

Instinctively, in that instant, I jerked the handle in my grasp, sent my flying-circle rushing sidewise to avoid that misty ray. The next instant the green ray had struck through the air where I had been, and as it did so, the sharp thunder of a great detonation sounded in my ears, while my fleeting circle reeled beneath a swift and sudden rush of air about me! I knew it was the deadly vacuum ray that Carson had seen, the green ray that destroyed all atmosphere about what it struck, creating a perfect vacuum by annihilating the air in its path, and thus slaying any living thing within its range by that vacuum. Even as I had rushed sidewise, through, to avoid that deadly ray, the pursuing turtle-creatures had swerved their racing circle likewise, and in another moment another shaft of the green ray stabbed toward me.

AGAIN I swerved, dipping downward, but this time the misty ray had driven past but a few feet from my circle's edge, and the resulting stunning detonation beside me had all but upset my flying craft. Clinging desperately to its controls, twisting and turning in a vain effort to escape these merciless pursuers whose deadly shafts were flashing about me, I felt my blood rising in swift, burning anger, looked swiftly about and then saw that at my own flying-circle's edge was attached one of the big metal hemispheres like that from which they loosed their ray. I saw, too, that on the side of the switch-case before me was a green stud that I had not noticed before, and with sudden resolution I swerved my fleeing circle swiftly about upon my pursuers, the hemisphere on its edge turned toward them, and then pressed the green stud. At once there leaped back from the hemisphere at my circle's edge a shaft of misty green light, stabbing toward my pursuers and past them at a short distance. As the sharp thunder of its detonation came to my ears I saw the pursuing circle dip and reel suddenly as the ray created a vacuum beside it.

Still it drove on toward me, and then as I sent my own circle rushing straight back toward it, our two deadly rays crossed and clashed there in mid-air, both of us swerving instantly to avoid the opposing ray. Circling, dipping, striking, we hung there beneath the giant transparent roof, high above the great moon city that lay in the dusk far beneath, engaged in what was surely as strange a battle as ever was fought. I knew, though, that that battle could not continue for long, for my opponents were very skillful in handling the great flying-circles, and it was only by superhuman efforts that I had been able to avoid their leaping shafts of green light as long as I had. Those green shafts striking from our circles produced a swift succession of great thundering detonations about us, and I knew that should the sounds be heard in the city far beneath, it would be a matter of moments before other flying-circles would be racing up also. Knowing that, I decided to risk all on a desperate expedient which had occurred to me, and which would give me a chance, at least, of destroying my pursuers.

Driving my circle toward the hovering circle of my enemies, I waited until their green ray had leaped lightning-like toward me, cleaving the air but a few feet above me as I dipped from it, and then as the thunderous detonation of that ray sounded, I collapsed suddenly, went limp there on the surface of my flying-circle, its control loose in my grasp. It went whirling downward through the dusk without my guiding hand, while I clung to it. I saw the rays of the enemy circle cease as it did so, saw them driving smoothly down after my falling circle, as though to inspect it more closely. Swiftly they slanted down after me, while I clung frantically to my own circle's surface. Then as they swept nearer toward my tumbling craft I grasped its control, righted it with one swift motion, and before the driving circle beside me could swerve away had pressed the ray-stud and had sent a shaft of the green ray stabbing toward the group of moon-creatures at its center!

As that green ray struck them I heard the rocking detonation of it loud in my ears, and in that moment, while their circle drove beside my own, I saw the creatures upon it suddenly collapsing and staggering and falling, falling to death as their bodies swelled, broke, and exploded before my eyes! The next instant, with no living hand at its controls, their great flying-circle was driving crazily down toward the shrouding dusk beneath in a long slant, disappearing in the dusk in another moment as it plunged to destruction! Then, with my own flying-circle speeding smoothly on through the dusk, I lay for a few moments motionless at its center, filled with the sick horror that had flooded through me as I had seen the turtle-creatures explode beneath my ray, forgetful for the moment of all save the hideous form of death that had overtaken them in the green shaft of light that I had loosed upon them.

When I overcame that horror and came back to a complete realization of my position, I found by circle still soaring smoothly onward through the dusk which veiled all things about me. Now I sent the strange great craft slanting downward again, down through the thick twilight until the gleam of the transparent roof had receded again to far above me, until I could make out again the masses of faceted buildings and thronged metal streets of the great moon city beneath. As I drove cautiously down over it, avoiding with utter care the flying-circles, swarming here and there above it, I became convinced that the battle which I had fought high in the dusk above had aroused no attention here in the city below, since no alarm had been given. Flying-circles still swarmed across the city from roof to roof, and in the metal streets the turtle-creatures continued to throng, but there was no evidence that any had heard the detonations of our combat.

Satisfied that this was the case, I gazed about me to ascertain the direction of the great plaza from which I had come. But now I saw that the great buildings and the streets, above which I moved, were so similar in appearance to each other that there was nothing by which I could remember the way I had come. Swift

panic shoot through me, as I comprehended suddenly that my circlings and turnings in the battle high in the dusk overhead had hopelessly confused all my direction-sense, and that, without any landmarks to remember in the great moon city beneath me, I had no idea where the great plaza, with our cylinder beneath it, might lie! I was lost—lost there above the great city of the moon creatures!

CHAPTER VII

Through Strange Perils

A COLD, uncontrollable terror gripped me as I realized that I had lost all idea of my whereabouts, that I might wander through the dusk over this colossal moon city until some unavoidable accident would inevitably discover me to its hordes beneath. Then, forcing myself to consider my situation calmly, I strove to remember in what direction I had come from the great plaza, but found the effort in vain, my twistings and turnings aloft having hopelessly confused me. To rise higher for a wider survey of the great city was useless, since the higher one went, the more difficult did the dusk make such a survey. I came to the conclusion, finally, that my best hope was to move on over the city in search of Carson and Trent as I had been doing, trusting that my search might bring me within sight of the great central plaza.

So, sending the great flying-circle down toward the huge, crystal-like metal buildings, I began again to soar smoothly above them at moderate speed, watching intently for some sign of my friends, scanning the crowded streets and the great buildings carefully for some trace of them. On and on, over the weird seemingly-endless city of the moon-creatures I went, but all its vast expanse seemed the same, geometrically patterned rows of giant buildings, their inset circles glowing with soft light; the ways between them crowded with the never-ceasing throngs of the turtle-creatures, and the air above them swarming with great flying-circles like my own, among which I desperately twisted and turned in the dusk. On I went, and had been engaged in this seemingly fruitless survey for some two hours, had begun to think that after all my quest was useless and that Carson and Trent had been slain in the struggle there in the plaza. But the sight of a gigantic building of the same shape as all the others of this strange city, but immeasurably larger than any I had yet seen, drove all such thoughts from my mind.

A single titanic crystal of metal, with many angles and faceted sides, set with glowing circle and triangular window, it loomed giant-like among the smaller faceted crystals that were the buildings about it, its own vast bulk lifting for fully two thousand feet toward the transparent roof far above. I sensed, immediately, that this was some center of the moon city's activities, the more so because its great flat roof was alive with flying-circles landing and departing. To venture near it, I knew, was to risk instant discovery, so swarming with life was the air above it and the streets about it, yet hope was rising suddenly in me, and I drove the flying-circle down toward the great building's faceted side, partly hidden by that side and by the thick dusk from the masses of flying-circles arriving and departing above. Then, gazing forth with hope-quickened eyes, I began to move slowly with my great flat [illegible] the mighty structure's side, gazing [illegible] triangular windows as I passed [illegible] when I had passed around half th[illegible]

[illegible]

the moment I had seen it, had appeared to me white, *human!* For but a moment that face had showed at one of the triangular little windows set in the mighty building's side above me, but that uncertain glimpse through the dusk had given me sudden new hope. Quickly I grasped the control of my flying-circle, began to move up toward that window. The next moment I had swerved outward again from it, for glancing down, I noticed a number of turtle-creatures standing motionless at the mighty building's base among the surging throngs about it. Apparently they were guards, and they were gazing up toward me through the dusk! I dared not loiter longer outside the great building's side lest their suspicions be definitely aroused, and with something like despair I sent my flying-circle driving upward instead.

As I shot upward, though, above the level of the great building's roof, I saw that which suddenly renewed my hope. The masses of departing and arriving circles had ceased for the time being on that roof, and amid the flying-circles resting on it I could see a round opening and a stair leading downward. Gazing across the great roof, hovering in the dusk beside it, I saw then that there were guards upon it, a half-dozen turtle-guards armed with ray-hemispheres, but that they were moving toward a great flying-circle which had landed upon the roof's far side a moment before, one that was loaded with many strange machines. Not only the guards were moving toward it, but up through the opening from the great building's interior were pouring several scores of turtle-creatures who were heading toward that newly landed circle, preparing apparently to unload from it the mechanisms it carried.

Within a moment all had hurried toward that disk, far across the great roof, and as I peered through the dusk toward it, I saw that the opening leading downward was quite unguarded. A moment I hesitated, then abruptly sent my flying-circle throbbing smoothly downward toward that opening on the roof. Down I slanted, the circle coming smoothly to rest in a moment on the flat roof beside the opening, and then I had sprung from it to the roof, gazing fearfully across it through the thick dusk toward the group of turtle-creatures about the newly-landed circle at the edge, hundreds of feet from me. They had apparently not noticed my landing circle in the deep twilight, and at once I sprang toward the opening leading downward, pistol in hand, and was creeping silently but swiftly down the narrow stair that led into the mighty building's interior.

DOWN—down—step after step I crept, silently as possible and with pistol ready, down until I saw that the stair ended a dozen feet below me in a wide corridor from which opened many doors. From those doors came sounds of activity, humming of machines and deep tones of turtle-creatures, and I gripped my weapon tightly as I crept toward the nearest of them. In a moment I had reached it, was silently drawing myself to its edge, peering inside. There was a great room inside, duskily illuminated like the broad corridor by a few circles of glowing light. Within it were great, looming mechanisms, moving cogs and bars and chains which were mysteries to me, tended by a score or more

[illegible]

turtle-creatures. In the shadowy corridor I had met none of them, so far, but knew that not for long could my good fortune thus continue, knew that with the return of those who had poured out upon the roof, the corridors would be filled with them. Swiftly and silently I crept on, toward a stair that I could see now leading downward from the corridor, a metal stair, down which I crept as I had descended the first, to find myself in a long corridor almost exactly like that which I had just left. From it too opened many doors, but through the deeper shadows of that corridor I crept toward the continuation of the stair, almost without seeing the interior of those busy rooms. It seemed incredible that I had progressed even so far downward without discovery, but I knew that the level of that window, in which I had seen the face that had brought me down into the great building on this mad quest, lay considerably lower.

Down another stair I crept, and another, and another —shrinking back as I came down the third to see a half-dozen turtle-creatures approaching me along the corridor beneath, bearing some machine with them. But though I crouched on the stair with pistol gripped tightly, they did not come that way. Instead they passed along the dusky corridor beneath, and as their footsteps on the smooth metal receded, I was down into the hall, moving through its dusk toward the next stair to take me to the level below, which I estimated to be the level I sought. Down that last stair I moved, but when I reached its bottom I stopped abruptly short. For though it ended in a corridor like those above me, that corridor had a metal wall on its right side only. On its left side was sheer space, and as I crept to that side and gazed downward, I saw that there dropped downward the great emptiness of a titanic room, a vast, circular hall that was hundreds of feet in diameter and in height, and near whose curving ceiling I was crouching, only a low rail separating the floor of the corridor in which I crouched from the great room's emptiness.

A great, soft-lit hall it was that must have occupied a half of the giant building's interior, and peering down, enthralled, I saw that upon its circular floor were ranged thousands of low metal seats, empty now, their emptiness making the room seem greater. At their center, though, was a round clear space and there, about a small triangular metal table, sat three turtle-creatures, three monsters who seemed silently examining a litter of thin metal sheets and a mass of small models or mechanisms before them. Quite silent they sat, at that vast fane's center, yet seemed strangely to dominate it, fill it. For a while I gazed at them, then, recalled to realization of my own purpose and peril by some sound above, turned swiftly. I was on the level I had sought, I knew, and I knew that the room whose window I had noted lay somewhere to the right from me. So, hastening along the dusky corridor, the gigantic soft-lit hall's depths still to my left, I felt my heart beat with hope again, as I saw before me another branching corridor turning to the right from the one I followed. In a moment I was at it, hurrying around the corner into it. And as I turned that corner, flinging myself recklessly forward by then, I collided full with a great turtle-creature who had been coming round it toward me!

The great monster and I had crashed together at the same moment that I caught sight of him, and then before I could raise the pistol in my hand he had grasped me, knocking it from my grip, and we were straining there together in a death-grip! Even as the great taloned paws had closed about me, as I had been pulled in toward the hideous, shell-cased body, I realized in a flash that a single cry from the creature would sound the alarm, and so had grasped his snake-like neck just beneath the reptilian head, in a throttling grip into which I put all my power. Thus for a moment that seemed endless to me, we stood there together, silent, almost motionless, locked in a death-grip in the corridor's shadows, the great taloned limbs crushing about my body with inconceivable force, even as my own hands closed tighter about the snaky throat. I felt my strength going as the relentless crushing grip about me held, but heard too strangled cries from the creature whose throat I held, and then felt his grip on me relax as he struck out with all his force to free himself from me and from the grip that was throttling him. Whirling me about with terrific power, he strove to free himself, yet his struggles were weakening and dwindling, as I held fiercely on. Another moment and with a sudden collapsing movement, the creature had slumped downward. A moment I retained my grip, then satisfied that the monster was dead, I straightened, looking wildly about me.

NOTHING disturbed the dusk of the corridors about me, no alarm having sounded, but now the sounds overhead were nearing me and I knew that the creatures on the roof were pouring back down into the building. Swiftly I glanced about, panting still, then moved forward down the corridor into which I had been turning, toward the right. The body of my late antagonist I left where it had fallen, perforce, though I would have wished to conceal it lest the first passer in the corridor discover it and comprehend what had happened. Down this new hall I went, and found that though doors opened from it, the rooms held no humming machines or turtle-creatures like the others I had seen; these seemed dark and empty. A few moments more and the end of the corridor loomed before me, a blank wall. But to one side of the hall near its end was the last of the open doors, and one that I judged must lead into the room whose window I had seen from outside.

Cautiously, though, I crept toward that open door, disregarding in my excitement the nearing sounds of the coming of the turtle-creatures from above, creeping toward that door until I was at its edge, peering with beating heart inside. So dark was the room's interior into which I looked, that for the moment I could make out only the triangular section of dusky light that was its window. I took a step forward toward the open door, another—and then sprawled on the corridor's floor as though knocked back by some giant invisible hand from within! Even in the instant that I fell, I knew what had happened, knew that across that apparently open door there stretched a sheet of invisible force through which no matter could penetrate. But even as I fell, then even as I rose swiftly to my feet, I noted a stir of movement inside the room's dark interior, saw dark figures within rushing toward the invisible door, toward me, the dim light of the corridor falling upon them through that door as they did so, erect, dark figures at sight of which I gasped aloud.

"Carson—Trent—*Howland!*" I exclaimed, and at the same moment heard a cry from the foremost of them.

"Behind you—quick!" cried Carson.

I whirled around, and behind me stood three of the great moon-creatures! Even as I whirled and saw them I knew that they had found the body of their slain fellow in the corridor, had searched after me to overtake me at the very moment that I had found my friends. Even as I turned toward them their great arms had swung up above me, the ray-hemispheres in their grasp. I flung up my arms toward them in that flashing moment, but was too late to ward off their blows, for the next instant one of the metal weapons had descended upon my head with crushing force. I

Before the driving beside me could swerve away, I had pressed the ray-stud and had sent a shaft of the green ray stabbing straight toward the group of moon-creatures at its center!

felt myself swaying, stumbling and falling before them, and then they and all else about me vanished from my mind as darkness overwhelmed me.

CHAPTER VIII

Howland's Story

CONSCIOUSNESS came back to me through fiery mists of pain, consciousness in which my first sensation was of a throbbing ache that beat through my brain like the dull beat of a great machine. Moving about somewhat exploringly, I found that I was lying on a smooth, hard floor, and that there was a similar smooth wall beside me. Then with an effort, I opened my eyes. I was lying in a small, almost dark room, its metal ceiling a half-score feet above me. A triangular window opened upon a great soft-lit, dusky space outside. Then, as I stirred, I heard movements on the room's other side and in a moment there had come toward me and were bending over me three figures at sight of which I caught my breath, remembrance of all that had happened rushing over me.

"Carson—Trent—Howland!" I exclaimed again. "I've found you then, Carson—and you've found Howland!"

Carson nodded silently, and then Howland, who was bending down with keen, eager face to help me to a sitting position, spoke.

"Carson and Trent and you have found me," he said, "have come from earth to moon to find me—but only to be imprisoned with me!"

I turned to Carson. "Then you and Trent were captured in that fight on the plaza—brought here and imprisoned?" I asked. He nodded.

"Captured there and brought here and imprisoned with Howland, only a few hours ago," he said. "But you, Foster?"

Swiftly I explained to him how I had managed to escape the moon-creatures, when the alarm had been

cylinder, beneath the plaza; of how I had slain the guard in my battle over the shaft and had stolen a flying-circle to soar up over the moon-city in search of my friends; of how on that flying-circle I had ventured across the great city, had fought my wild battle with the flying-circle of the turtle-creatures who had discovered me, high in the dusk above the city, and of how, after finding myself lost over the city, I had stumbled upon the gigantic building in a window of which I had glimpsed the face that had made me dare all risks to venture down into that building in search of my friends, only to be discovered, stricken senseless, and imprisoned with them. When I had finished, they sat for a time in silence, and I saw that Howland's face was working.

"I did not dream that Carson and Trent and you might ever follow me here, through all these perils," he said, slowly. "I never dreamed that any there might be who would venture from earth to moon after the moon-creatures who captured me."

"It was Carson's plan," I told him. "It was he who saw you captured, there in the camp at Yucatan, and it was he who suggested that we follow—out to the moon—to rescue you and to take back to earth proof of the doom that Carson thought hangs above it."

"You thought that, Carson?" asked Howland, turning quickly toward him, and when the other had nodded, his eyes grew brooding, strange. "Then you have divined the truth. You know now that within hours these countless millions of moon-creatures, who fill the mighty city about us, will be starting to leave that city, will be starting to leave the moon, forever—will be launching their first hordes, their first terrific attack, against the earth to seize it for themselves, and to wipe from existence for all time all the races of man!"

He was silent again for a moment, gazing out through the little window and across the great, unearthly city of faceted metal buildings, of swarming flying-circles and turtle-creatures, that lay in the dusk about us, and then he turned again toward us.

"Carson—Trent—to whom I've had time to tell nothing in the hour or so you've been here, hearing your own tale," he began, "and you, Foster—you three know how I was captured by the moon raiders there in our camp at Yucatan. Carson has told you how Willings and the rest were slain, how I was captured by the turtle-creatures and taken down into their cylinder on the next night, how that cylinder was driven out through the gulf when the signal-note sounded, out to the moon itself on the great beam, out at awful speed and through the moon's shaft, like your own cylinder, to come to rest there beneath the plaza's disk. Then the cylinder's bottom was opening, and the packed flying-circles inside it were emerging, with myself on one of them still, moving up through the great opening and above the great lunar city itself.

"OVER that colossal city, lying in dusk beneath the lunar night, our flying-circles drove, a city that I recognized was built upon the far side of the moon from earth, and which amazed me utterly. Why had these turtle-races built their tremendous, air-tight city on the moon's far side alone, where it could never be seen from earth? Was it for that reason that they had built it there? That thought startled me, but before I could consider it farther, my captors had sped across the great faceted buildings of the city and had reached their goal, a single greater building, hugest of all I had seen, this building in which we now are, and which is the great center of government for the moon-race. Down toward its roof our flying-circles slanted, coming to rest on that roof, and then after being challenged by guards upon the roof, we were passing down into this great building's interior.

"Down through corridors and stairs and halls we went until we had reached the colossal hall that occupies most of this great structure, and that was filled then with a full three thousand of turtle-creatures ranged in regular rows of seats about it. At its center sat three others, about a triangular table, and I saw instantly that this was the great council that ruled the moon, and that the central three were, without doubt, its heads! Toward those three I was immediately led by my captors; who then made swift explanations, in their deep tones, to the three and to the thousands about them. Then, the center of interest for all the grotesque turtle-creatures massed about me, I stood there, wondering, awe-stricken, until the bass voices of the three leaders recalled me to myself.

"Just as I had done the first time, I replied in English, convincing them that my speech was wholly different from their own. They pondered a moment, then gave brief orders. At once I was hurried out of the great hall, back up into the building to this cell, one whose open door was closed upon me by a sheet of force projected across it, a sheet of force quite transparent to the vibrations of light and heat and so forth, but utterly impervious to matter-vibrations, thus forming a door more secure than steel. The window was quite open, and is still, but escape by it is impossible, because it is set in the sheer walls of the great building and lies hundreds of feet from either ground or roof. Then I was given food, a semi-liquid food that tasted like some chemical to me, and that was obviously artificially made by the synthesis of organic compounds directly from their original elements.

"Left alone for a time, I endeavored in vain to comprehend the strange situation in which I found myself; the purpose of these monsters in raiding earth; the presence of the great shaft and disk there on earth; the earth-like gravitation here on the moon; the gigantic preparations and activity going on all about me. My thoughts were soon interrupted by the arrival of three turtle-creatures who, I found, had been sent by the great council to instruct me in their language. Pointing to objects outside, they called them by name in their strange tongue, I repeating after them as best my human voice could. In this way I gradually acquired a few words of their strange language, and soon picked up the rudiments of that language, could express myself haltingly to them, and could understand a great deal of their conversation.

"Day after day, hour after hour, they kept at me, until I could exchange ideas with my teachers with some fair success. They informed me, partly by gestures, that they had been ordered to instruct me in the moon-creatures' tongue so that I might be questioned by the great council which I had already seen. That council was called the Council of Three Thousand, while the three leaders of it which I had seen were called the Council of Three. The great council represented the whole moon-creature race, as I learned, with the Council of Three acting as executives. Learning this, I strove to learn more, questioned my instructors as to the reason for my capture, for the moon-creatures' raid to earth. And, because they had been given no orders otherwise, they told me readily enough. And in that telling, in the eon-old history of these moon-creatures which they laid bare to me at last, I saw at last the true colossal solution of the great enigmas that had puzzled me, and saw too what gigantic doom it was that was hanging above our unsuspecting earth! Learned what I had never dreamed before, learned that these moon-creatures had not always dwelt here upon the moon but that they had come here eons in the past, *had come here from our own earth!*

Yes, from our own earth! For eons ago, earth was far different from the earth we know. It was a young planet, a planet covered almost completely by its great seas that now have receded, seas which covered almost all its face, leaving but small sections of land here and there. And in those seas, as we know, began earth's life. Starting from the first crude jelly-like forms at those seas' bottom, climbing up the great ladder of evolution through invertebrate and vertebrate forms, that life developed—developed into the prehistoric armored fishes, into the great crustaceans, into the great shell-coated sea-monsters, at whose size and ferocity we can but guess. Life swarming and abundant, life developing through thousands of different forms, but all life in or about the sea! For in our earth's youth, ages were to pass before the first land-forms were to appear, before the first land-creatures that were to develop into the mammals and into man had come to exist.

"Out of that great swarm of different forms of life, sea-life and amphibious life, there developed finally a single race or species of more intelligence than any of the rest, which rose slowly to dominance above the rest. A race of amphibious beings it was, armored with thick shell and with great taloned limbs, with snake-like neck and reptilian head, a race seeming like great turtle-creatures to us, yet which were in reality far, far different from any crustacean forms, or any other forms of which we have knowledge. A race of beings out of the world's dim, forgotten youth, all memory of which has passed on earth. Yet there, in the long-dead past, these turtle-creatures had risen to power above all the other reptilian and amphibious and sea forms about them, by reason of their great intelligence, their reasoning power. They had climbed upward to the supreme position in their world just as man, ages later, was to climb, and so at last developed a civilization equalling and surpassing the later one of man.

"Cities they built across the earth's surface, strange amphibious cities built along the sea's shores, inhabited by that strange, amphibious turtle-people. As the seas on earth slowly receded, though, they lost their amphibious nature, became wholly land-creatures, though unchanged in appearance. And in their great cities their power and their knowledge, their science, rose ever to greater levels. They discovered the forces of the world about them, of electricity and radium and heat, built cities ever more gigantic, came at last to have all the earth beneath their sway. From icy pole to icy pole the turtle-creatures reigned supreme. They even penetrated into the depths of space, with the great telescopes that they had constructed. And, peering out across those depths, they made a great discovery; they discovered that earth's moon was inhabited as well as earth itself!

"Earth's moon was inhabited, and had been inhabited for eons before earth itself. This, of course, is not surprising, when we consider the origin of earth and moon. We know, thanks to Chamberlin and Moulton, who first promulgated the theory, that in the remote past, the sun was but a single great fiery ball, spinning in space without accompanying planets; that some other sun, some other star, passing close to it through space, set up in our sun great tidal waves of its fiery self, great waves that instead of receding broke loose and burst out from the sun, forming into smaller fiery masses that fell into orbits about it, moving around it in regular order and forming the eight major worlds of our solar system. Some of these worlds, in turn, due to unstable conditions, threw off in turn smaller fiery masses which were to become their moons. The fiery mass that was earth thus threw off a smaller single mass that was to be our moon. This the turtle-creatures knew to be the history of the solar system's formation.

"They knew, too, what is evident to all, that the smaller of such fiery masses cooled and solidified far more quickly than did the larger. For that reason, the smaller flaming mass that was the moon had solidified and cooled long before the earth. Its molten mass had cooled into rock, its elements had condensed into great seas that covered the greater part of its surface, and following the usual evolution of worlds, those seas, with their erosion and the added erosion of wind and weather, had worn away the barren rock partially into small particles, into soil, so that finally the moon's surface was much like earth's is now, a surface mostly covered with its great oceans, but with continents also, with great mountain ranges and deep valleys.

"All of this the turtle-creatures, reigning on earth, had guessed, but now as they peered out toward the moon they found that it was inhabited by a strange race of great black worm-beings, like huge worms in shape, but of intelligence and knowledge of science greater even than their own. By means of great light-signals they were able to communicate across the gulf with these beings, and from them learned how they had arisen on the moon long before. For when the moon's surface had cooled, had formed great continents and seas, life had arisen upon it also, life that had changed through a myriad alien forms of its own, there on the moon, while earth was still a fiery mass upon which nothing might live! And on the moon too, long ago, one form had become dominant above all others, a race of great black worm-folk whose strange shapes and swift movements were the result in some way of the moon's gravitational power, so much less than that of earth. These worm-folk had risen to supremacy on the moon, by their own science and power, while earth was still but a molten ball, and as the ages had moved on, their science and their power had steadily increased.

"But at last there loomed before them a situation which required all that science and power to overcome. The moon had cooled quickly, had solidified quickly, in accordance with the law of the evolution of worlds, but in continued obedience to that law it was still cooling, was growing colder and colder. Soon, the worm-folk knew, its fiery heart would have become completely cold, and then life would become impossible upon the moon, since as it cooled, its air was deserting it. Its great seas had dwindled and vanished long before, though this meant nothing to the worm-folk, who by their science, could produce artificial water supplies. But if their world grew completely cold, if its atmosphere left it as they knew it would soon do, nothing could prevent their extinction. So all the great scientists of the worm-folk met to find some means of staving off the doom that hung over them.

"IT was impossible for the worm-folk to migrate to earth, since earth had just begun to solidify, to cool, and was still a great ball of half-liquid lava. It was true also of the other planets, so they knew they must meet their problem on the moon. Thereupon, they devised a tremendous plan by which they might save themselves. And this plan was none other than to enclose all the moon's surface, all its sphere, with a great transparent and air-tight covering, or roof. Beneath this covering they could live comfortably and safely enough, for it would not be difficult to construct great plants to supply their air-tight city with an artificial atmosphere. It meant a titanic labor, even for the powerful worm-folk, to adopt this mighty proposal, but it meant too that they could thenceforward live upon their world unthreatened by any danger. They set to work upon it at once.

"It had taken them an age to complete that gigantic task, an age throughout the years of which all the mil-

lions of the great worm-folk had labored upon it. At last it was completed. They had erected, several miles above the moon's surface, a mighty transparent roof, which was of a transparent alloy of metals, stronger than any we know, and which admitted unchecked the sun's life-giving light and heat but which was completely air-tight. Then they had constructed their giant atmosphere plants, plants which functioned automatically, replenishing and purifying the atmosphere of the great air-tight space, and which made the air question of no further danger to them. Their great transparent roof was so supported by great pillars placed at a few strategic places that there was no danger of it ever falling or breaking. Outside the last remnants of the moon's natural atmosphere had left it, leaving but a perfect vacuum outside the air-tight roof, but inside it the worm-folk had in plenty the air which they required, like most creatures, for life, and so could live on unharmed in their air-tight city that covered all the moon.

"For age upon age they had lived on thus, in that strange and mighty hermetically-sealed city, while the earth was cooling, and forming its continents and seas as the moon had done once. And swiftly on that earth, as I have said, life had arisen in a myriad swarming forms, life that had produced at last the great race of turtle-creatures who had become dominant and who ruled by that time over all the earth. And, as I have said, these turtle-creatures, with their growing science, had peered out and discovered the strange worm-folk whose mighty city lay beneath the moon's great gleaming roof. They had, by means of their light-signals, managed to communicate with them, and let them know that there was now an intelligent race on earth, also.

Even as I turned toward them, their great arms had swung up above me, the ray-hemispheres in their grasp

"The worm-folk, in their great moon city, were surprised to learn that such a race of intelligent beings had arisen on earth, for long before they had lost interest in earth and its savage creatures. Now, though, welcoming the event as a break in the monotony of their lives in their air-tight world, they communicated at length with the turtle-creatures on earth, and finally began to devise a plan by which members of the two races might visit one another, by which they might cross the gulf that lay between moon and earth. And finally the worm-folk, whose science was greater far than that of the turtle-creatures, devised a plan by which that gulf could be crossed, almost instantly and without danger. Communicating their plan and its details to the turtle-creatures on earth, both races began to construct the apparatus that would enable them to cross the void.

"That apparatus, which the worm-folk had devised, was a great disk which shot forth a beam of terrific power, a beam whose pressure and power were due to the phenomenon of light-pressure. You know that light exerts a considerable pressure upon objects which it strikes. You have seen the various methods by which physicists have measured this pressure, the various small mechanisms such as radiometers and the like which they have claimed to be driven by that pressure. Well, the disks which the worm-folk had devised shot forth a great light beam generated by mechanisms which concentrated the pressure of a vast amount of light into one single, terrific beam. The worm-folk constructed a disk like that in a deep, vertical shaft on the moon's surface, while the turtle-creatures, following their communicated instructions, constructed a similar disk in a similar shaft on earth. Then came the first trip across the space, made by a score of the worm-folk.

"These entered a cylinder specially made to insulate them against the cold of space, an hermetically tight cylinder which they placed upon the great disk in the shaft on the moon. This shaft was in the side of the moon which is always turned toward earth. They waited then, all but one in the cylinder. That one remained at the switch outside. Finally there came a great bell-signal, one which told them automatically that the two shafts, the one on the moon and the one on earth, were facing each other exactly at that moment, pointing straight toward each other like two great cannon. As that signal sounded, the one at the switch threw that switch and leaped inside the cylinder, closing it. The next instant the great beam had driven up from the disk, had driven them up and outward, through a special valve-opening they had placed in their great transparent roof, out across the mighty void between moon and earth. And that great beam, driving the cylinder before it by its own light-pressure, drove it on through space at almost the speed of light itself, just as an empty can, driven forward by the stream of water from a hose, will drive on at almost as great a speed as the stream about it rushes.

Propelled through the gulf by the great beam at that awful velocity, it took one instant to flash the great cylinder from moon to earth.

"From moon to earth they flashed, and straight into the great shaft in the earth's surface, down into that shaft. As they went down, the approach of their cylinder automatically turned on an opposing beam from the disk beneath them, which brought them swiftly and smoothly to a stop.

Then the worm-folk emerged from their cylinder, the first travelers across the void, the first moon-beings to venture to earth, and they were greeted by the turtle-creatures who had gathered about them in great numbers.

The gravitation power of earth, of course, was far greater than the gravitation power on the moon, but this did not trouble the worm-folks. They had devised something which would easily overcome that difficulty. As they came out from the cylinder, they boarded a small craft they had brought with them for the purpose, in which was embodied a mechanism that could increase or decrease the gravitational force about it at will, by either intensifying or weakening (whichever the circumstances demanded) with its own vibrations the vibrations of gravitational force. The worm-folk, therefore, could move freely about the earth in their craft, and could inspect the cities of the turtle-creatures.

"After that first visit, many such visits were made, worm-folk flashing down to the earth on the beam in their cylinders, while turtle-creatures flashed up to the moon in their cylinders on the beam from their shaft, in the same way. And the great worm-folk, whose science was so much greater than that of the turtle-creatures on earth, taught them, instructed them, generously and unselfishly, gave to them out of their stores of science and knowledge, without suspicion or reserve. And ever the turtle-creatures learned from these mighty beings whose civilization had been great on the moon while earth was still a fiery mass, learned and learned. Turtle-creatures flashed to the moon in numbers to inspect the great wonders of the air-tight city that covered all the moon, to learn from the great worm-scientists the secrets which they had discovered, the control of nature's forces which they had attained to. While down to earth from the moon came numbers of the worm-folk to help and to instruct the rising races of the turtle-creatures. An intercourse it was between earth and moon, between two mighty and intelligent races of unlike beings, taking place eons, ages, before man or the forerunners of man had ever arisen on earth!"

CHAPTER IX

A Saga of Worlds

"SO the two great races had dwelt together, one on the moon and one on the earth, the older race of the worm-folk on the older world of the moon, and the younger turtle-creatures on the earth. Following out the things they had learned from their instructors on the moon, the turtle-creatures reared greater and greater cities, came to greater and greater power. It must have seemed to them, indeed, that they were lords of earth beyond any shadow of question, that none upon earth dared doubt their will. But fate, if there is a fate that smiles grimly above our tiny worlds, was even then preparing a great catastrophe that was to rush upon them, a giant blind and brutal force of nature against which all their science and power could not stand. And that cataclysmic force that crept at last upon them with the thunder of doom was—the glacier.

"The glacier, mightiest of all forces that move upon this earth, shaping earth's very face with its slow, resistless movement! A gigantic tide of ice, sweeping southward and northward from the poles, across the face of earth. Sweeping southward and northward at eon-long intervals as earth's poles incline toward the sun, sending the giant polar ice-masses creeping across earth's face toward the equator. Giant floods of irresistible ice, marching inexorably out across earth from the polar regions and only receding from earth's face when earth's poles tilt away from the sun once more. The glacier, that carves the very mountains of earth from out its surface, with grinding, inconceivable power—and that was the colossal icy doom that was creeping forth now upon the world of the turtle-creatures!

"Startled as they were by the first alarm, they rallied at once to repel this cataclysmic doom that was marching southward and northward upon them. Their first move was to devise great heat-producing mechanisms, mechanisms that shot forth giant rays of intense heat, and with which they sought to melt the oncoming glacial floods. But though these mighty rays instantly melted the ice masses that they touched, those melted masses froze again when the heat rays were turned off. Also the great melting ice-masses soon flooded them so that the operation of the mighty ray-mechanisms was impossible, and they saw now that such rays could never hold back the glacial masses, even though they were kept constantly trained upon them, since resulting floods would sweep away the mechanisms, and then with their passing would freeze again to ice. Discarding this method, therefore, the turtle-creatures sought for others. They could not ask the worm-folk on the moon for aid in this, their great extremity, since they had become with passing ages proud of their own science and power, had rejected those who had been their teachers, so that the once-great intercourse between moon and earth had almost entirely ceased. They must fight their great battle alone, and they fought desperately.

"Their next move was the construction of a mighty moat or ditch across the glaciers' path, one that was miles wide and many miles deep, and which they hoped might stop the oncoming icy floods. Using great vibrations which broke down matter by destroying the chemical affinity between its atoms, separating those atoms from each other, they blasted, completely around the north and south polar regions, a giant moat that was a score of miles in depth and of equal width. The great ice-masses rolled on toward those giant moats, and into them, pouring into their great depths, so that for the time it seemed that their plan had been successful and that the march of the great glaciers had been halted. But still, steadily, slowly, remorselessly, those glacial floods were grinding on, on until soon they had filled even the great moats before them, were pouring on unchecked toward the equator.

"NORTHWARD and southward they swept, unchecked, and then the turtle-creatures saw at last that all their efforts were in vain, that there was no way by which these resistless icy floods could be halted in their titanic march over earth's surface. Already their northernmost and southernmost cities were being overwhelmed by the giant ice-masses, those great ice floods surging across their cities, grinding into fragments their soaring structures, the great, many-sided and faceted buildings that made up those cities. From north and southward the turtle-creatures were fleeing from those cities, and it had now become evident that the great glaciers could not be stayed, and that the turtle-races could only stave off annihilation by flight from earth, across which the great ice-floods were grinding! And there was but one place to which all the turtle-hordes could quickly flee, and that was to the earth's moon!

"Yet how, the turtle-creatures asked themselves, could they hope to find a refuge on the moon? For it was covered completely with the great city of the worm-folk, whose transparent and air-tight roof covered all the moon's surface. So great in number were the worm-folk that there could never be room upon the comparatively small moon for them and the turtle-creatures also. In hundreds of millions, in billions, swarmed the worm-folk in their strange vast covered city, and for the equally great hordes of the turtle-creatures to hope to share their moon-world with them was out of the question. There was but one chance left for them, the turtle-creatures decided, and that was to destroy utterly all the great worm-folk, and seize the moon-world for themselves.

"But what hope had they of doing this? They asked that question of each other. What hope had they of conquering and destroying the great worm-folk, who were farther advanced in science and power than they were, and who were equal in number to themselves? They could send invading parties of turtle-men out to the moon on the great beam, but such invaders would never return; they would be annihilated instantly by the terrific weapons, which they knew that the worm-folk possessed. It never occurred to any of the turtle-creatures that it was blackest treachery they were proposing in this contemplated annihilation of the friendly

worm-folk, who had helped and instructed them through their own scientific knowledge. To the turtle-creatures' mind, unimpaired by the right and wrong of the thing that did not exist. Their problem was to find some way in which they might quickly annihilate the whole races of the worm-folk, and seize their world, and that problem seemed insoluble to them.

"But at last, spurred on by the cruel menace of the growing glaciers that were moving steadily over earth's surface, the turtle-creatures found an answer to that problem. They found a method by which all the mighty races of the worm-folk on the moon could be annihilated in a single moment. They found a way by which, without the slightest danger to themselves, they could instantly depopulate the whole moon world. And that method, the weapon which they could use for it, was the great beam of light pressure that shot the cylinders back and forth to the moon, the great beam which the worm-folk themselves had devised for them!

"The center of the turtle-creatures' great plan was the fact that the air-tight city of the worm-folk, its mighty transparent roof, extended over all the moon's surface. As I have said, the worm-folk, being air-breathing beings like the turtle-creatures, like ourselves like almost every form of life had made that great roof air-tight, so that their artificial atmosphere inside it could not escape to the vacuum of outer space. For around and outside that mighty shield there lay only the utter vacuum and cold of the outer void. And well they knew that if any creatures were in their great roof, all their atmosphere would instantly rush out through those openings into the great void outside, just as a container of air if opened within a vacuum, would instantly lose its air into that vacuum. An opening in the great roof, indeed would mean that the moon world beneath that roof would be stripped in an instant of all its air, and that in that same instant the whole race of the worm-folk would be destroyed by the vanishing of the air that meant life for them. For this reason they had been extremely careful in building their great roof to make it quite hermetically sealed and air-tight, since an opening in it meant instant death to them.

"The turtle-creatures knew this well for many of them had visited the moon world when communications between moon and earth, between the worm-folk and the turtle-creatures, had been frequent. Now they remembered it they made it the basis for their gigantic plan. That plan, which was now well formulated, was merely to use the pressure beam to smash the great roof of the worm-folk. The whole artificial atmosphere of the moon world would instantly rush forth into space and in that instant the worm-folk would be annihilated and the turtle-creatures could then proceed up to the moon world to at their leisure repair the punctured roof and take possession of the moon, and live upon it in safety while the great glacial tides rolled across their own world of earth!

"Such was the plan of the turtle-creatures, and they only needed a weapon with which to put it into effect to puncture the great roof of the moon world. And in the great mighty pressure beam that had driven their cylinders back and forth they found such a weapon. That great beam exerted immense pressure, pushing forward with terrific force, due to the great amount of light whose pressure was concentrated within it. The beam's pressure that had sent the cylinders back and forth from earth to moon, but now they planned to use it for their great plan, to use it to puncture the moon world's great roof. For they knew that the great beam's awful pressure, if turned upon that roof, would act as a stream of water from a powerful hose would through paper.

"This did the turtle-creatures plan to annihilate at one stroke the worm-folk in all their millions, and now at once they began to put their plan into effect. Having completed their preparations and intentions from the worm-folk on the moon, with whom their intercourse was now very limited, they prepared hundreds of great discs capable of shooting forth the mighty light pressure beams, setting them in great batteries over one side of earth and pointing them toward the moon. Swiftly they completed all, these discs of mighty power, while ever southward and northward toward them the menacing glaciers came over the land. At last all the disks were ready, and they waited only until a few nights had passed, until the moon was full, that they might strike their hundreds of great beams upward with greater accuracy. They knew that even a single great puncture in the moon world's roof would slay instantly all its inhabitants, but they desired to take no chances, and so had prepared the hundreds of disks that they might puncture that roof simultaneously in hundreds of places.

"The few nights of waiting passed soon enough. At last the full moon rose and the turtle-creatures knew that the moment had come. A moment it must have been indeed, as the universe held its breath a moment in which the great moon world prepared to leave and hurl itself upon the other great worlds and terrific force on them. Upward rose the earth from the full moon, the great gleaming roof over it gleaming now in splendor for the last time which the turtle-creatures in some manner stood waiting about their great batteries of discs on earth. Then waiting until the moon was almost directly overhead from across the whole side of earth flashed a signal, and in the next instant the hundreds of waiting discs had loosed their terrific beams, hundreds of beams of force driving straight toward the moon and the great gleaming roof that covered it!

"The turtle-creatures watching from earth with their great telescopes saw those beams strike the moon's face in hundreds of different places across its whole side. They saw them drive through the great air-tight roof and into the moon's surface with terrific power. And as they did so, as they shattered the mighty roof before them, they perceived with their instruments that out from beneath the shattered roof there rushed through the great openings within an instant all the moon world's artificial atmosphere, shown by clouds of vapor. They knew that all life upon the moon had perished! They knew that their great beams had indeed punctured and broken the air-tight roof of the moon in hundreds of places and that all the worm-folk races had gone to instant death when their atmosphere rushed out into the void. The turtle-creatures had with their one mighty stroke annihilated the life of a world!

"The great beams that they had shot forth in hundreds had indeed pierced through the great moon roof, but so terrific in power were they that they had driven on and on through and with all their awful force into the face of the moon itself. And hurling into the moon's surface with all the terrific power that was theirs, they had instantly caused great volcanic eruptions of craters out of the moon's surface in hundreds of places, and a stream of water shot forth at great force, as it had on earth, with power in that beam a great lake or crater.

"It was then that the hundreds of great craters that pit the face of the moon that turn toward the earth, came into being craters that have always puzzled the science of us humans. You know that it has been suggested that great meteors struck the moon and caused those craters, but that was impossible for it could have had across the moon when it was and the

meteorites themselves, though half-buried perhaps, would still be visible at the center of the great craters, and no such meteorites can be seen. If, on the other hand, they struck the moon while it was still semi-liquid at the surface, the craters they made would have closed up, flowed together smoothly again. It was not volcanic activity or meteorites that had formed those great craters, but the hundreds of giant beams from earth, gouging out those craters with inconceivable force, but leaving no trace of themselves.

"The turtle-creatures, however, were triumphant over the complete success of their mighty plan, and at once began to prepare to migrate in all their hordes to the moon, for it would not be long before the great glacial tides closed ever in upon them. Their first move was to send up a party of turtle-creatures to the moon in cylinders, driving them up with the beam here on earth, and equipping their cylinders with special apparatus to allow them to land safely on the moon, since the other transportation disk on the moon had of course been destroyed by the cataclysmic power of the hundreds of beams that had struck the earthward side of the moon. These first turtle-creatures reached the moon's earthward side safely, and found it a scene of terrific death. Beneath the punctured and broken roof, amid the giant craters that had been gouged from the earthward surface, lay the millions of the worm-folk, slain instantly when their atmosphere had rushed forth into the void through the openings in their great roof. The exploring turtle-creatures, protected from the vacuum about them by special air-tight craft, moved around to the moon's other side and found the city there filled with the worm-folk dead, too. The great roof was intact on that other side, and there were no giant craters, since it was only toward that side of the moon visible from earth that the great beams had stabbed.

"THE turtle-creatures on earth, after hearing the signalled news from the party they had sent to the moon, began preparations for the great migration of all their hordes, but before doing so they reached a momentous decision, namely, that they would settle only upon the other side of the moon, and not upon its earthward side at all, because, they reasoned, we of earth have slain all on the moon by stabbing with our beams at its earthward side and puncturing the great roof there. If we settle over all the moon, they said, rebuild that great roof on the moon's earthward side, we will be laying ourselves open to the same terrible fate. For if any other race of intelligent creatures ever rose on earth in the future, they could slay all the turtle-creatures on the moon by the same method that we used to eliminate the worm-folk. But if the turtle-creatures settled only upon the moon's other side, which was turned always away from the earth, it would be impossible for any on earth to reach them or puncture their roof with rays, or even to know of their presence.

"For these reasons, therefore, the turtle-creatures decided to settle upon the moon's other side only, and they made that decision the more willingly since the moon's earthward side was torn now with gigantic craters that their beams had caused. Sending a larger party of thousands up to the moon, then, these thousands prepared for their coming. They first closed in the great transparent roof, which still stretched unbroken over all the moon's other side, building transparent walls from it down to the moon's surface so that the whole other side was completely covered. The earthward side lay bare and shattered and neglected by them. It was not exactly half the moon's surface they covered in that other side, but a little more than half, as can be seen from earth. It was not a little less than half the hordes of their race that they were going to bring up to the moon, so they had to cover a little more than half the moon's surface. They placed on either side just far enough around the moon's other side so that they could not be visible at all from our earth.

"This done, the turtle-creatures working there put into operation the great atmosphere-plants, which again turned forth their artificial atmosphere, serving now but half the moon, yet maintaining within the transparent and air-tight roof of that half a breathable and perfect atmosphere. The turtle-creatures had by then destroyed completely the strange subterranean cities of the worm-folk and their dead millions, themselves constructing in place of them giant crystal-like buildings of metal, angled and faceted and strange, like those of the turtle-creatures on earth. They then set themselves to overcome the last obstacle that remained to prevent the turtle-hordes from moving to the moon, that obstacle being the difference in gravitational power between moon and earth.

"For the gravitational power of the moon was, as I have said, one-sixth that of earth, and the turtle-creatures, accustomed to the greater gravity of earth, could not live long on the moon, the weaker gravity there affecting their internal structure fatally. The visitors who had gone from earth to moon formerly, though, and those of the worm-folk who had come from moon to earth, had overcome this change of gravitational power in the way that I have already described, by using craft in which were mechanisms that altered the gravitational power about them at will; increasing that power by generating a vibration which was tuned to increase the intensity of the vibrations of gravitational force; and decreasing that power by generating a vibration tuned to damp or decrease the vibrations of gravitational force.

"It was by means of these generating mechanisms that the turtle-creatures had visited the moon in the past, had sent their thousands of workers there now, increasing the moon's gravitational power by means of those mechanisms until it was, in their craft, the same as on earth. Now they began to build similar generators, but of gigantic power and size, mighty generators that would be able to change the gravitational power on the moon's whole other side, increasing that power there until it was the same as on earth! They built these great generators, then buried here and there beneath the surface on the moon's other side, generators that functioned automatically and unceasingly and that made the moon's other side the same as earth, as far as gravity was concerned. The turtle-creatures could walk about that surface at will, unhampered, and without ill effects; they could live there as they did on earth.

"All was ready; the great air-tight city that covered almost all the moon's other side, the artificial atmosphere that was maintained within it, the change of gravity that had been made. All was ready to come to the final step of their gigantic plan, to bring the hordes of the turtle-creatures from earth to moon. They must be brought soon, for by this time the great glaciers had covered almost all the earth; yet here the laboring turtle-creatures up on the moon met another obstacle. How were they to bring those vast hordes from the earth to the other side of the moon? They could not drive them up in cylinders straight toward that other side, since that other side was never turned toward earth. Neither could they bring them up to the moon's earthward side and travel across a great stretch of great waste and bring them around in air-tight craft to the other side. They had done that with their first thousands; where, but could not hope to do so with all the turtle-creatures millions on earth, in the limited time that was left. Pondering this difficulty, the turtle-creatures up on the moon at last had made all difficulties to solve the problem in the most direct manner.

"THEIR solution of that problem was a truly titanic one. They planned to pierce a great shaft clear through the moon, from its earthward side to the other side. That shaft, with an airlock, opening in the heart of their great air-tight city on the other side, would enable them to bring their hordes straight from earth to that other side, across the gulf of space in the great cylinders, driven by the mighty beam, and on through the great shaft, through the moon, to emerge into the air-tight city on its other side. So the turtle-creatures on the moon commenced work at once upon that great project, and in heated frenzy they labored upon it to complete it in time to bring their races from earth. Using the great vibrations they had used before, which destroyed matter by destroying the affinity of its atoms, they steadily blasted a great circular or cylindrical shaft straight through the moon's sphere. That shaft opened on the moon's earthward side in the great crater that we now call Copernicus, while its end at the moon's other side was just beneath the great plaza that lies at the center of their city.

"In that plaza, then, at the shaft's end, they placed one of the great disks to shoot forth the mighty light-pressure beam, a disk which could shoot its beam *downward*, through the shaft, through the moon and across the earth, and *upward* toward the great transparent roof above. The beam, if turned *upward* from the disk, would crash up and through the transparent roof above, would puncture that roof and allow the great air-tight city's atmosphere to rush out into space, of course, and slay instantly all the turtle-creatures as they had slain the worm-folk. They did not plan to use the beam that way, but placed the great disk there and made it possible to shoot its beam upward so that, if they wished, in the far future, to visit one of the other planets with that beam, they would be able to construct an air-lock and a valve-opening in the roof just above the disk, and drive cylinders out and upward to other planets in that way. They feared, somehow, that earth would possibly never again be fit for habitation even though the icy glaciers receded, and they desired to have some way of reaching other planets which they could not reach by sending the beam downward. This upward beam, though, was never used by them, nor was any valve-opening ever constructed above. In time they gave up the thought of reaching other planets. But the beam still could be shot upward, by means of the great switch at the opening in the plaza.

"So, having placed the disk there in the plaza, with its beam capable of being shot downward or upward, all was ready for the coming of the turtle-creatures in all their hordes from earth. A great central disk had been prepared on earth, in what is now Yucatan, since except for a belt of the earth's tropical regions, the mighty glaciers had swept out by then until they covered all earth. At the center of a great mound they had sunk their shaft, placing at its bottom the great disk, taking to it the thousands of cylinders that would be necessary to transport the races of turtle-creatures from earth to moon. Then, when all was ready, the first of those cylinders was placed upon the disk, with others waiting beside it. Into the cylinder there went the great flying-craft of the turtle-creatures, their great flying-circles, propelled by the same method of gravitation-change they had already used, flying-circles that filled that cylinder, masses of the turtle-creatures upon them. There was a wait then, until the moon was directly overhead, the great shaft through it directly in line with the shaft in the mound. Then at that exact moment, a great bell-signal sounded automatically, the disk's mechanism was turned on, and in an instant the cylinder and its freight of turtle-creatures was driving out across the gulf to the moon.

"Out through the void it drove with lightning-speed, within instants, toward the crater of Copernicus, toward the great shaft in it, clicking on through that shaft through the moon; through a great valve or door in the shaft that opened automatically before it and closed as swiftly behind it, an air-lock and valves that prevented the escape of the air-tight city's air through the shaft, through the sphere of the moon itself, coming to rest beneath the great disk there in the plaza. Instantly the cylinder was snapped aside, for even as it had flashed out through the void, others loaded likewise were flashing out after it, in the few seconds that the two shafts on earth and moon were in line.

"So each night, as moon and earth faced each other with the shafts in each, the disks in each, in line, the turtle-creatures on earth sent more of their cylinders driving out, until within weeks the last of all the turtle-creatures on earth were leaving it—leaving it in the last cylinder, turning on the beam and clicking up through space from that disk in their cylinder. The whole races of the turtle-creatures had been flashed from earth to moon on the great beam in those cylinders, cylinders that had been flashed back empty from the moon to be driven up again with new loads, until all the turtle-races had passed up thus from earth to moon, to their air-tight city on the other side of the moon. A mighty migration of countless millions of beings, from world to spinning world!

CHAPTER X

To Crash Down Man Forever!

"SO at last, at the last moment, the turtle-creatures had saved themselves from doom, had moved in a mighty mass from earth to moon. Settling in all their hordes in their mighty city upon the moon's far side, they took up life as comfortably and as safely as on earth. The air they breathed was made for them artificially by their great atmosphere plants, and enclosed beneath the mighty transparent roof. The power of the moon's gravity had been increased to that of earth by the generators beneath their great city. Nothing had been forgotten that might serve their comfort, and they had found in their mighty air-tight city on the other side of the moon a safe refuge from the great glacier floods that were rolling across the earth.

"For on earth, as they could see now, those mighty glacial tides had forged on until all but a small part of earth's surface was covered by them, grinding on across the earth and obliterating beneath them the crushed and shattered cities of the turtle-creatures over which they forged. Safe on the moon's other side, though, the turtle-creatures gave but small attention to earth, beginning again their life in that strange city. Gradually they became accustomed to the long lunar days and night, each of approximately two weeks length, and by scientifically changing some of the characteristics of their own bodies were able to live as usual through the dusk of the lunar nights, nights but softly illuminated by the circles of light they had set in their buildings' sides, and they were able also to remain in unhindered life and movement during the two weeks of the lunar day, not being bothered by the length of that brilliant day. They became, in fact, completely habituated to the moon, almost forgetting that they had ever lived upon the earth.

"Almost forgotten, too, was the moon's earthward side, since hardly ever did any venture from their comfortable air-tight city on the far side to the airless, savage and barren surface of the near or earthward side. Upon that side still yawned the mighty craters gouged out by the great beams, and about and among

those craters there lay the remnants of the great wrecked city of the worm-folk that had once covered the moon's earthward side, the remnants of the great gleaming roof that had once covered that side also. Those great gleaming fragments of the shattered roof lay most thick about the crater that we call Tycho, though they extended here and there across the moon's whole earthward side. Because of that, because their gleaming surface reflected back the sunlight brilliantly, Tycho and the brilliant-gleaming region about it were to be a great mystery to man and the science of man, who could not know that those great gleaming regions marked the last shattered remnants of the giant roof of the worm-folk, that had once extended over the moon's whole earthward side.

"Forgotten by the turtle-creatures, who could not even see it from the great city on the moon's other side, earth worked on toward its destiny. The great glaciers that had covered almost all its surface moved northward and southward almost to the equators, lay for ages upon that surface, so that the earth was a barren world of ice, a great frozen desert. It almost seemed that the thought of the turtle-creatures had been right and that earth would never again be the abode of life. But at last the sun's heat falling upon its central regions, the glaciers that lay over those regions began to recede. Slowly, sullenly, but steadily, the great ice-floods receded back to the polar regions to north and south, until once more the rest of earth's surface lay warm and habitable, scarred and scored with deep valleys and great mountain ranges by the glaciers that had passed over it. The ice terror had passed and earth was again a world in which life could flourish.

As I gathered myself for the leap that I knew was hopeless, there was a clicking sound behind me, and a broad ray of green and misty light drove past me from behind

"Life, though, had been almost wholly wiped from earth's surface by those grinding floods of ice. The great race of the turtle-creatures was gone, fled to the moon, and the other forms of life, the great reptilian forms of earth's youth, had perished beneath the ice. Only smaller forms were left now, forms that had preserved themselves in sea and on land, and now these remaining forms began to increase and multiply as the glaciers went back and the earth grew warm once more. Changing into a myriad protean shapes, climbing upward on the path of evolution with the spur of cruel conditions ever behind it, life surged through countless forms, from saurian to mammal, while at last, out of the mammal forms, there rose the first crude ape-like creatures that were the progenitors of man.

"So, at last, out of that ruck of changing species, of shifting forms and characteristics, there rose the races of man, moving upward with ever-increasing intelligence, from troglodyte to savage to modern man. And man had become lord of all earth, never dreaming or suspecting that long before him there had ruled on earth the turtle-creatures, whose civilization and science were as great or greater than that of man. For though men sent their vision searching into space, as their predecessors had done long before them, though they saw and photographed the giant craters on the moon, the strange-gleaming patches upon that moon, never did they dream of the true terrible origin of those craters and gleaming patches. Never did they guess that even then, out on the other side of the moon which man had never seen, there stretched the colossal, air-tight city in which the turtle-creatures in their millions still went their ways.

"Nor did the turtle-creatures, within that city, have more knowledge of this new race of man that had risen to be lords of earth. For long ago, as I have said, the turtle-creatures had lost all interest in the earth from which they had come. Comfortable and safe in their strange, great moon-city, they had noticed that the glaciers had receded, had supposed that new forms of life would arise on earth, but had not been enough interested in the possibility to send even a single party of explorers back to earth. The great disk in the central plaza of their city, and the shaft that led down through the moon from it, were unused, during all those centuries, those ages. The turtle-creatures had forgotten earth.

"So, forgetting it, they lived on in their moon city, but at last there came to disturb their safe life the looming specter of a great menace that threatened their existence—a menace slower and subtler and less spectacular than the glaciers that had driven them from earth, but fully as deadly. Their artificial air and water supplies threatened to fail them. For, as I have said, there was no air or water upon the moon, save a little frozen vapor lingering in its craters. Artificially, though, the turtle-creatures, like the worm-folk before them, had manufactured their own air and water supplies by the great atmosphere and water plants set here and there in their city.

"THESE great plants produced their air and water by a combined process of chemical analysis and synthesis, carried on on a vast scale. Their first step was to take great quantities of certain of the moon's compounds, compounds containing hydrogen and nitrogen and oxygen. Then, by treating these in great masses with an altered form of their matter-destroying vibrations, they destroyed the chemical affinity of the atoms of those compounds, loosing those atoms one from the other, breaking up the compounds into their original elements. The atoms of hydrogen and oxygen and nitrogen thus released were drawn off from this first disintegrating process into huge underground tanks or containers in which the gases were stored.

"From these great containers the gases were drawn forth at will, and hydrogen and oxygen atoms were mixed together automatically, two atoms of hydrogen to one of oxygen, to form H_2O or water. In the same way four nitrogen atoms would be combined with one of oxygen, in vast quantities, to form air. This is, of course, but a brief outline of the turtle-creatures' process, which was in reality more complicated. From these great central mixing plants the water supplies

were piped to every portion of the moon city, while the atmosphere supplies were automatically loosed at the exact rate required to replenish the atmosphere beneath their great roof. The whole of this vast process was carried on by automatic machinery, requiring but small attention on the part of the turtle-creatures, and they saw no reason why it could not be continued indefinitely.

"But now, at last, they had come to see that soon those processes would come to a halt, for lack of the elements that were vital to them.

"More and more difficult was it becoming to procure supplies of the compounds which they disintegrated to get their supplies of nitrogen and oxygen and hydrogen, since it was but a certain number of compounds that could be used by their process with any degree of effectiveness. And these compounds were not plentiful in the moon's materials, and had already been used for ages, by the turtle-creatures and by the worm-folk long before them. Deeper into the bowels of the moon they penetrated for the compounds that gave them their water and air, but they began to see that before long those compounds would be almost wholly unavailable, and the moon would no longer be habitable for them.

"Realizing this, they began to look about them once more for a new place of refuge from the doom that was once more overtaking them. Naturally enough, they had no inclination to become a totally extinct race—at least, not without a definite struggle for survival.

"Their first thought was of the sun's other planets, since there in their central plaza they still had the great disk whose beam could be shot upward and out into space, once they constructed the necessary air-lock valve in the transparent roof above it. But after considering the situation, they saw that escape to one of the other planets was out of the question, because even if there were one habitable for them, it would take a considerable time to transport all their hordes across the space from the moon to such a planet. And they knew that they did not have much time in which to work—they knew their time was very limited.

"Seeing this, they turned their thoughts, after the passing of ages, back to earth once more, to the earth from which they had come. Peering across the gulf toward it with their instruments, they saw that, as they had noted before, the great glaciers had long ago receded, and saw, too, that earth had become warm and habitable. To pour all their hordes back to earth from the moon would take little time, since the disk at their city's center could shoot their cylinders straight down their great shaft through the moon and across to earth. The shaft on earth, too, they thought, and the disk inside it must still be lying unharmed in the depths of what is now Yucatan, since they had sunk that shaft in the great mound where it was protected from the shifting dirt of ages, and they knew that the great glaciers had not quite reached the region in which that mound was located.

"Earth, then, was a safe refuge for them again, the more so because they had originated there and its gravitational power would be what they were always accustomed to, on earth and on the moon.

ONE thing, however, prevented them from pouring down to earth in all their hordes at once. During the ages that had passed, some new race of intelligent beings might have arisen on earth, which the moon-creatures would have to fight with, when they descended on earth.

"They decided, therefore, to send an exploring party down in a single cylinder, to make certain of earth's present habitable condition and to find out the power and intelligence of any race that happened to have risen to supremacy on this planet.

"A hundred or more of the turtle-creatures, therefore, rose on their flying-circles and moved into one of the great cylinders. That cylinder was snapped into the framework beneath the great disk, and the beam was turned on.

"A moment more and that beam was driving the cylinder down through the shaft, down through the moon and out its earthward side, out across the gulf once more, to flash down into the great shaft in Yucatan and come to rest within it, flying across the void from moon to earth at the moment when the two shafts were in line as they had been before.

"Down into the shaft in Yucatan their first raiding party had dropped, a shaft near which fate had brought our own scientific party. Then out of that shaft on their flying-circles came the moon raiders, the turtle-creatures, slaying Willings and the rest, imprisoning me as a specimen of earth's races. Swiftly and scientifically they proceeded on their survey, taking all the instruments, books and papers in our tents, taking samples of earth and air and water, taking specimens of the bird and beast and insect life about them, gathering all the information possible from about them, to take them back with them to their fellow millions in the great city on the other side of the moon. And back to that city on the next night they had gone, back up to the moon and through it to the great moon-city on its other side, back with me and with their gathered specimens and data to the great Council of Three Thousand before which I had been taken and subsequently questioned.

"Then I was imprisoned in the great Council Building, and those turtle-creatures who instructed me in their strange tongue and who told me this gigantic saga of the turtle-races, this tremendous chronicle of eons of time and vast voids of space and tremendous dooms of worlds, that I have just told to you, had come. And hearing that great tale I, Howland, understood at last the true awful significance of that swift descent on earth by the moon-raiders, understood at last what terrible doom it was that hung over the earth now as the turtle-creatures prepared to pour down upon it once more. But then, as I learned enough of the turtle-creatures' tongue to roughly speak and understand it, I was taken again before the Council of Three Thousand for questioning.

"There, with the great Council about me and the Council of Three questioning me, they examined me as to the state of affairs on earth. They had learned much, I found, from the books and papers and instruments that their raiders had brought back from our camp, and which they had been soon able to decipher. But when the Council of Three questioned me, I refused absolutely to answer them. Well I knew that my refusal would gain earth no respite, that death was the doom that awaited me for such refusal, yet I would not help them in the slightest in their terrible plan that meant the annihilation of the world of man. And when the Council of Three saw this, they ordered me back to this cell, to be kept alive, so that their scientists might experiment on me, in the hope of finding some way by which human intelligence could be blotted out without affecting the human body, so that when they will have conquered earth they could spare from the annihilation of its peoples enough humans to serve them as slaves and machine-tenders.

"It was only a few days ago that I was brought back to this cell, for while I had been held in it and had learned their tongue, the long lunar night had waned and the brilliant lunar day had waxed across the city, and had waned to give place to the dusk of night once

more, the dusk of this night that is about us now. During night and day and night again, without ceasing, I had seen their great preparations going on unremittingly in all the mighty city about me, had seen their flying-circles massing their great stores of weapons and instruments and materials, preparing to pour into the great cylinders beneath the plaza, to flash down in those cylinders to earth in their first great attack on the inhabitants of that planet.

"Within days more, as I had heard from the Council, that attack would take place, the first masses of cylinders flashing down the beam to earth when the bell-note sounds to mark the time when the shaft through the moon and the shaft on earth are in line. Each twenty-four hours, during the last days, I have heard that distant great note, and each one seemed a note knelling the doom of our world. Several hours ago, when I heard the note again, I knew that the next time it sounded it would mean the end, for when the bell-note sounds again, when the two shafts are in line as they will be again in a few hours, the time will have come for the great attack and the moon-creatures will be pouring down to earth on the great beam in their cylinders. I did not dream, though, when I heard that last note sound that you three were flashing up from earth and the disk on earth, upon the great beam in your cylinder, through the moon and out into the moon-city to find me. I never dreamed that, until Carson and Trent were brought and imprisoned here with me, to serve with me, as specimens for the experiments of the turtle-scientists.

"Now, Carson, Trent and Foster, you know all; you know the great doom that is looming and gathering above our earth. For even now, in the great city about us, the turtle-creatures are completing their last preparations, gathering together all the flying-circles and forces that will be launched down upon earth. Within hardly more than a dozen hours the great bell-note from the plaza will sound again, will mark once more the moment when shaft on earth and shaft through moon are in line. And when that signal sounds countless cylinders in masses, filled with terrific, irresistible hordes of flying-circles and turtle-creatures, will be driving down to earth on the great beam! Will be pouring down to earth to annihilate humanity as they annihilated the worm-folk, to crash down man and the supremacy of man forever, and make the turtle-creatures once more the masters of all the earth!"

CHAPTER XI

A Fight for Freedom

"THE turtle-creatures once more the masters of all the earth!"

Howland's words, in the silence that followed his story, seemed vibrating in the little cell about us, like the note of some great warning bell, a bell that was striking the doom of earth. I seemed to see, in that moment, a swift succession of pictures in the dusk of the place; seemed to see cylinders in hundreds, thousands, flashing down from moon to earth on the great beam; seemed to see those cylinders giving forth their freight of flying-circles and turtle-creatures, those flying-circles flashing north and south and east and west from the shaft in Yucatan, out over all the world of man; seemed to see dreadnaughts and artillery and airplanes vanquished and destroyed, reeling back before the swift and mighty flying-circles, the deadly vacuum rays, millions of man's great cities' inhabitants going to death beneath those rays; [illegible] from pole to pole and the races of man annihilated, save for a few mindless things left as slaves to the turtle-creatures!

Beneath that awful vision my brain reeled, while Carson and Trent and Howland beside me stared with brooding eyes that held a horror as great as my own. Through the triangular opening in the wall we could gaze out over the great dusky moon-city, swarming still as before with turtle-creatures and flying-circles, with all the mighty hordes of the moon-creatures, gathering their forces now for their first great attack on earth. And, gazing out across that mighty city with the titanic saga, which Howland had just related, vibrating still in our minds, gazing out across that great city that stood where eons before the strange city of the worm-folk had stood, our minds could grasp but one great fact of all that crowded upon them, could comprehend but the one great horror of what had just been revealed to us.

"The turtle-creatures once more the masters of all the earth—and we who alone could warn earth imprisoned here!" exclaimed Carson.

"Imprisoned here without hope of escape," assented Howland somberly. "And within hours, now, their great attack begins. When the great bell-signal beneath the plaza sounds three notes, it will be the signal for the turtle-creatures' flying-circles and forces across all the city to start toward the plaza, to enter the cylinders beneath it so that when the single great note sounds they may be shot down to earth on the beam."

"But *is* there no hope of escape?" I cried. "Isn't there any way by which we, who alone know of it, can halt this deadly invasion?"

Howland looked at me thoughtfully. "There is a way," he said slowly, and afterward I was to remember his words, "a way by which the menace of these turtle-creatures might be removed forever, could we but escape from here. Yet how can we win free of this cell?"

Hopelessly we looked about us. The cell's door, which seemed to the eye quite open and unbarred, was in reality barred more securely than by steel, closed unchangeably to us by the sheet of invisible force across it, through which no matter could penetrate. Nor, when we turned to the window, were our hopes raised in the least. For that window, though quite open and large enough to allow us to pass through it, was set directly in the outer wall of the great building, in one of the great smooth facets of that building's side. Below and above stretched the mighty structure's wall, for it was hundreds of feet from our window to the crowded streets below, and almost as great a distance to the roof. The facet in which our window was set, too, was quite vertical, the one beneath it slanting inward and the one above it slanting inward, too, like the face of a great gem exactly. Without rope of any kind, we knew that to attempt escape from the window would be but to meet instant death.

Yet we could not give up hope of escape, hope of finding some way to escape from our prison and to get to the great chamber beneath the plaza, to get to one of the cylinders and back to warn the earth. We examined every corner of our dusky cell, inspected door and window exhaustively, but in vain. We could find no way of escape, while through the corridors outside we could discern a ceaseless movement of turtle-figures, bearing their loads of weapons and instruments and materials up through the great building to its roof, loading them, [illegible] upon the flying-circles that rested there awaiting the great signal of three notes that would send [illegible]

wrapped in thoughts of his own, beckoned us to his side.

"There is but one chance in thousands for us to escape from this cell," he told us, quickly. "But with only an almost certain death ahead of us, we must take that chance, and soon. Each twenty-four hours food has been brought me here by two guards, and if they come as they should again, within the next hour or so, we will have that one chance to escape."

Then he went on to explain to us the plan that he had formed, while Carson and Trent and I listened intently. Simple enough and desperate, too, was the plan he proposed, yet it was at the same time the one way by which we had even the faintest hope of escaping from our cell, so without further discussion we agreed upon it. It seemed possible that by it one or two of us, in any case, might be able to escape from the cell, and it was agreed that whoever did so should make for the roof and endeavor to steal a flying-circle and head toward the great plaza and the chamber of cylinders beneath it. The whole scheme, of course, was perhaps the most desperate and reckless one possible, yet it was, as Howland said, a chance, and as such we grasped at it eagerly. Then, since all depended upon the coming of turtle-guards with food, we waited anxiously for their coming, when we might put the scheme into effect.

NOW, looking back, it seems to me that the time that followed was almost the most agonizing I ever spent—the time in which we sat motionless and silent there in the dusky cell, awaiting the coming of the two guards. Carson watching at the force-defended entrance, Howland and Trent and I seated across the room, we waited in silence. And never, surely, could there have been a stranger scene than the one we must have formed. Four men, white-faced and unmoving and silent, seated there in the dusky cell in the mighty building's side, with groups of busy and monstrous turtle-creatures pouring through the corridors beyond, with other masses of turtle-creatures surging through the streets of the colossal dim-lit city about us, with flying-circles throbbing thickly through the air, all gathering here on the moon's far side, beneath the great transparent roof that covered that side, to pour down within hours, now, upon earth and the races of earth.

Slowly the minutes passed, their passage unmarked by any change in the unceasing dusk of the city about us, nor in that city's activities. Would the turtle-guards not come, after all? Had we been forgotten in the great preparations going on, and was our last wild chance to be lost to us? Tensely, despairingly, we waited, knowing now that but little more than an hour remained before the three great notes from the plaza would sound, before the moon hordes would be massing toward that plaza, and the great chamber beneath it. Now we heard the activities in the city without, in the great building's corridors, slowing, ceasing, and we looked at each other with startled eyes. The turtle-creatures' preparations were complete and their first great attack was ready to be launched!

There was a sound as of many turtle-creatures moving down from the building's roof through its interior, a sound of many heavy steps and of deep, bass voices, and then these seemed to have passed, and again there reigned a sudden silence in the great building and in the city without. Gazing out from the window we could see that the great flying-circles throbbing to and fro seemed to have settled in masses upon the roofs of the great buildings, that the turtle-hordes were gathered together in crowds, surging no longer through the streets. They were waiting—waiting for the great force which within the hour would be pouring into the cylinders beneath the plaza, to flash down to earth! As realization of all this, of our swift-waning time, struck me, I wheeled from the window with an exclamation on my lips. But before I could utter it, Carson had whirled silently from the door by which he watched, his hand raised toward us.

"The turtle-guards!" he whispered. "They are coming!"

Struck motionless and silent by his words we listened for an instant, then we heard clearly the sound of heavy steps approaching us on the metal floor of the corridor outside, of deep bass voices rapidly nearing us. At once, then, we put into execution the plan we had formed, for these coming ones could be none other than the guards, the turtle-guards with our food. Throwing ourselves upon the cell's floor, therefore, we lay there quite motionless, I near the door, Carson and Trent a little away from me, and Howland at the dusky room's other side. There, lying completely stiff and motionless, with closed eyes, we awaited with trembling nerves the coming of the turtle-creatures.

A moment more and they were outside our invisible force-door, halting there. Lying facing them, without moving a muscle of my body that might be noticed, I opened my eyes slightly and saw them through my lashes, halting outside. I saw one reach forth to touch a stud on the wall outside, heard a click, and then, though all was as before, I knew that the force-door had been lifted from across the opening. Then through that opening came carefully, watchfully, the great turtle-creatures, and as I saw them I almost cried aloud in my despair. For these were not the two guards that had brought Howland's food, and whom we had expected, upon whose coming our plan had hinged! These were five in number, four of them armed with ray-hemispheres that they kept trained upon us, the other unarmed and seeming to command them, an air of authority apparent in his tones and manner. And as I saw him I comprehended in a flash the thing that a malign fate had put upon us. These guards and that commanding one came to our cell only to take us to the laboratories of the turtle-scientists!

Utterly cold went my heart as I divined this, yet even so I moved no muscle as the four guards and their leader came in toward us. I saw them stop in amazement as they looked down upon us lying prone upon the floor, saw their weapons turned towards us still, as though fearful of some surprise. The leading turtle-creature, surveying us in something like surprise, spoke aloud to us in his deep tones, evidently to arouse us, but we didn't move. We remained stiff and motionless. He reached a taloned foot or paw toward me, who was nearest to him, stirred me with it; but despite the cruel prodding of those talons I lay limp, unchanged. Then, quite perplexed, apparently, he bent down over me, to examine me. It was the chance for which I had waited. As he bent over me, as his face came close down to mine, my arms flashed up and gripped him!

THE next instant was one of such wild combat and confusion in the dusky little cell as to defy description. At the instant that I grasped their leader, the four guards had swung all their weapons toward me, but did not dare to loose their rays in that moment lest they destroy their leader, too. And in the instant that their weapons had turned toward me, my three friends had leaped up also, and were upon the guards! Then we were whirling about the little cell in such fierce, swift battle as I had never known before. Grasping still the turtle-creature with whom I struggled, I strove to attain upon his snaky neck the hold which experience had taught me was the one vulnerable point in these shell-cased monsters. Before I could gain that hold, though, his own tremendously powerful limbs had

grasped my own throat with taloned paws, and swiftly then were choking me!

As I struggled madly there, I caught sight of Carson swaying in a death-grip with another, striving with taut muscles to prevent the thing from bringing his hemisphere into play; I saw Trent, who had grasped one of the creatures by the neck, send that creature slumping down in death on the floor and leaping upon another, who sought to escape through the open door; saw Howland rolling at the room's side with still another, who seemed to be overcoming him; heard the mingled sounds of deep vibrating voices and hoarse exclamations, of struggling bodies and the clang of metal, as the weapons of the guards struck the floor. Then all about me seemed to be darkening before my eyes, as I felt the relentless grip on my own windpipe tightening!

I knew that a moment more of that grip would mean the end for me! I gathered all my strength for a supreme effort, and struck out at the turtle-creature who held me with all his force. The great blow broke loose his grip from about me, sent him whirling back against the room's far side, and as he reeled back I looked sharply about me, saw that at the same moment the antagonists of Howland and Trent, beside me, had broken from them, back to the room's side with the other, the three turtle-creatures facing us at that moment with Carson struggling somewhere behind me. All this I saw as I straightened there, then saw in the same instant one of the three monsters before us reach swiftly to the floor, to something round and gleaming there, to one of the deadly hemispheres which in the next moment he had swung swiftly straight toward us!

In that wild instant I knew that nothing could halt the death from that hemisphere, the deadly ray that would leap from it toward us, yet I gathered myself even then for the leap that I knew was hopeless. But as I did so, there was a little clicking sound behind me, a broad ray of green and misty light drove past me from behind, and then that ray had struck the three turtle-creatures at the room's other side, had struck them with a detonation that in the little room was thunderous, deafening! And as it did so, I saw them swaying, reeling, falling; saw their bodies suddenly puff, swell, explode, falling in shattered, broken masses to the room's floor! I turned, unsteadily, to see that at the critical moment, Carson had overcome his own antagonist and had wrenched from him, as he slumped downward, the hemisphere whose ray he had loosed upon the three creatures opposite us!

Panting, torn, wild-eyed, we gazed unsteadily now about us, listening tensely. The detonation of the green vacuum ray had seemed titanic to us in the little cell, but apparently that cell's smallness had muffled the sound effectively, since there was no sound of alarm in the great building about us. A moment we listened, then reached toward the hemispheres on the floor, grasping their handles with our fingers on the control-buttons in those handles; then we were moving toward the door. Out that door we went, leaving the silent bodies of the five turtle-creatures in the dusk of the cell, out through the opening that was unbarred now by the invisible force-sheet, to find ourselves in the dusky corridor that led toward the left, toward the edge of the great Council Hall and the corridors leading upward.

"Less than an hour left!" Howland whispered as we crept forward down that corridor. "Pray God we get to the roof before the three warning-notes sound!"

It was a prayer echoed in all our hearts as we moved silently on. Swiftly the time was passing. The moment was approaching when earth and moon would again be in line with Jupiter, the [illegible] to flash down to earth. [illegible] with set faces we crept on down the corridor, until we came at last to the place where it ran into the larger corridor, the one whose stair led upward. We had not seen any trace of turtle-creatures as yet, and the whole building seemed strangely silent about us, but as we entered the larger corridor, we gazed watchfully along its length. In it there were no turtle-creatures visible, but before us, at the corridor's other side, there yawned the depths of the great Council Hall, along which it ran. Cautiously we crept toward it, toward the low rail that protected the corridor from the great hall's depths, then peered down over that rail forgetful of all else for the moment, at the sight beneath.

For there upon the floor of the mighty, soft-lit hall, whose vast, curving walls dropped beneath us for hundreds of feet, there sat now in the myriad seats, row upon row of silent turtle-creatures! Turtle-creatures who filled those seats, in strange, silent rows, the great Council of Three Thousand who ruled all these turtle-races! Silent, listening, they sat there, far beneath us, while at the clear space at the great floor's center were the three creatures whom I knew to be the Council of Three. One of them, now, was standing, was speaking to the three thousand about him in deep, strong tones, tones that came vaguely up to our own ears.

It came to me then, as we crouched there in the narrow gallery high above the great hall's floor, that it was now, on the very eve of their titanic expedition back to earth, that the Council of Three Thousand beneath us had been gathered. That the speaker at the room's center was addressing them, who soon would be pouring up to the roof and out on their flying-circles to the plaza, to the cylinders beneath it, that would carry them down to earth. He seemed to be exhorting them, reminding them of the power that had once been theirs on earth, reminding them of the doom that waited for all their races unless they conquered, unless they wiped earth clean of the races upon it, and won it for their own. Gazing down toward them, Carson and Howland and Trent and I stared as though fascinated, as well we might be, by that strange and solemn scene.

A moment more we gazed, and then Carson straightened, motioning silently to us, and we too straightened to go, and to start up toward the roof. But in the moment that we did so there was the slightest of sounds from behind us, and then before we could whirl around we had been gripped from behind, gripped by great taloned arms that grasped us, held us fast! Even as I flung myself around with wild fury in that grip I knew that we had been discovered, that a party of turtle-guards in the corridors had found us there, and crept up behind us. I heard a choking cry from Howland, as the others struggled wildly there beside me in that moment, and then as I, too, struck out and backward madly at the monster who held me from behind, I felt him lift me swiftly in his powerful arms and swing me out over the low rail before me, to drop me to death on the metal floor hundreds of feet below!

CHAPTER XII

Up the Wall

I THINK now that the terror I felt in that swift moment, when I hung above a dreadful death, so numbed me, that I was without power of motion. I remember being thrust out over the low rail, of the floor of the great room far below seeming to rush up toward me, the turtle-creatures upon it still unaware of our struggle high above them, and then as I closed my eyes and [illegible] to my fate I felt another grip [illegible] my shoulder and after an agonizing moment felt myself being pulled back over the

rail. As I touched the corridor's floor again, I saw that it was Carson who had saved me, after felling with a great blow the creature who had held me.

Beside me two others of the creatures lay still, and Howland, bleeding from a great cut in the side of his head, was raising the hemisphere in his hand to crash it down upon the head of the creature with whom he was struggling. Carson, as I found, had escaped the first grip of the creatures when they had crept up behind us, and had turned to crash down his heavy weapon upon them in swift blows that had felled two of them, Trent and Howland disposing of the other two. Luckily for us, the combat, wild as it was, had lasted for but a brief moment, because the creatures, feeling certain they would capture us, did not use their ray-hemispheres, for fear it would have sounded the alarm to the massed thousands of the Council far beneath. As it was, though, our fierce struggle had been so high above them that no sound of it had come down to them, and none had looked up toward us.

By this time we were moving forward along the corridor, toward the narrow stair that led upward to the next level, for we knew now that not many minutes remained to us if we were to reach the plaza and the cylinder beneath it in time. Carson leading, we ran toward that stair, but then stopped short as we gazed up. For in the corridor above we could discern through the dusk four more turtle-guards, lounging at the stair's top; we could see and hear other parties of them that seemed to ceaselessly patrol through the corridors and stairs clear up to the building's roof! It was apparent that we could never reach that roof, could never reach the flying-circles upon it; we could never go past the countless turtle-guards that were between us and the roof. For a moment we stood there in utter despair.

Then suddenly Carson's eyes lit up. "We can't get up through the building's interior to the roof," he whispered, "but there is a chance."

"A chance to get to the roof?" Howland asked, and Carson nodded.

"Yes," he said; "up the great building's outside wall!"

A moment we stared at him uncomprehending; then he pointed swiftly to a group of mechanisms and materials stacked along the corridor's side. We had passed them unheeding before, but now Carson's eyes were upon them.

"That drill-mechanism there," he said. "With that and the metal bars beside it we can make it up the wall!"

Then as he reached, picked up swiftly the drill-mechanism he spoke of, we understood. It was a metal affair some eighteen inches in length, the drill proper being of pure white metal much harder than the metal of the buildings and streets of the city, and more than an inch in diameter. The white drill projected from a bulbous casing on the side of which was a small control-switch, and as Carson touched this, it set the drill whirring swiftly, and he placed it against the metal wall beside us. We saw the white drill eating into that metal as smoothly and as swiftly as through wood. He pointed to the short metal bars that lay piled beyond, bars that were large enough to fit snugly into the holes made by the drill, and at once we understood his plan. Desperate as it was, we realized it was yet the one remaining chance to reach the roof, since now the minutes were fleeting fast and we could never pass through the numberless guards who filled the corridors above us.

So each of us grasping three of the short thick bars, and with the drill in Carson's hands, we raced back along the corridor, back to where the four guards with whom we had struggled a moment before still lay. One of them was stirring, showing signs of life, but we paid no attention to him in that tense moment, racing back down the branching corridor toward the cell from which we had escaped. In it lay the bodies of those whom the green ray had slain, and over them we raced toward the triangular window. Then Carson, drill in his grasp, was drawing himself up to that window, balancing there within it and drilling swiftly with the mechanism in his grasp a deep little hole in the metal of the wall just above it. In a moment that hole was made, and withdrawing the drill he placed in the hole one of the metal bars. It fitted snugly in it, as before, forming in effect a solid bar projecting outward for two feet from the great building's smooth side, above the window.

Clinging to this bar, therefore, and with feet still in the window's opening, Carson reached upward and swiftly bit with the drill a like hole a yard above the first. Into this also he inserted a bar, and then standing on the first bar, clinging to the one above it, he reached upward higher with the drill, boring swiftly a similar hole, inserting in it another bar, and moving upward thus a step on the great ladder which he himself was building in the great building's wall. Far outward and below us there stretched the great lunar city, its crystal-like buildings looming through the dusk, their roofs crowded with flying-circles and the streets crowded with turtle-creatures. These in the streets, though, could not see us through the dusk, apparently, for there came no alarm from beneath as Carson continued to creep upward.

Now Trent was following him, using his own bars in the holes which Carson had bored, creeping up the mighty building's smooth faceted side after him, inserting his bars in the drilled holes, pulling himsef up from bar to bar, and then drawing up after him the bar beneath him and using it to insert in the hole above. Howland, too, as Trent moved upward, was following him, using his own bars in the same way. I waited there at the window until Howland was a half-dozen feet above me, and then with beating heart I prepared to follow him, swung myself out of the window, last of the four, and inserted one of my three bars into the hole just above the window.

The bar fitted snugly, like the others, and in a moment I had placed another in the hole above it, was clambering up onto the first bar, as the others had done, and placing the third in the hole above. Then pulling myself up onto the second, grasping the third, I reached down and withdrew the first from its hole, straightened and placed it in a still higher hole above the two to which I clung. And thus I made my way up after my three friends, Carson and Trent and Howland. We were like four great bat-like creatures, moving up the great building's vertical wall through the shrouding dusk.

UP—up—bar after bar, hole after hole, a steady, unvarying progress that became semi-automatic to me. Once I looked down through the dusk at the crowded streets far below, the great turtle-hordes that filled those streets, then as an intolerable dizziness swept over me I gripped my bars tighter and forced myself to look upward. Above me I could see Carson, moving upward still with the drill in his grasp, boring holes in the softer metal of the great smooth wall, progressing steadily upward with drill and bars, while Trent and Howland and I followed in order beneath. And, gazing up beyond him, I could make out far above the faint gleam of the great transparent roof, the burning points above and outside it, that were the familiar constellations, the shining, unchanging stars.

Could men ever have moved upon a stranger journey than we up that mighty building's sheer, metal side? Up a building that held within it the great Council of the turtle-creatures, who when the three signal-notes sounded would be massing their great forces toward

the cylinders beneath the plaza, toward those cylinders which the last single note would send driving down through space to overwhelm our earth! Up a building set there on the other side of the moon from earth, with far below us the unsuspecting masses of the turtle-creatures' hordes, and far above us the great transparent roof that alone shielded this air-filled world from airless space! Up—up—bar after bar, hole after hole, until Carson above had reached the point where the building's great upper facets slanted inward, until I myself was more than a hundred feet above the window through which we had come. And it was at that point, glancing downward for a moment, that I saw projecting from that window beneath me the hideous reptilian head of one of the turtle-creatures, gazing straight up toward us!

As my eyes met those lidless, unhuman ones beneath, I shuddered involuntarily, an utter cold of fear seeming to flood through me there as I clung to my bars on the great building's side. I saw, in that moment as I gazed downward, that upon the creature's head was a great wound, saw and understood at once, that this was the turtle-guard whom we had seen stirring as we had raced back through the corridor, who had revived and had come after us. A moment only the creature below gazed up toward us, a moment in which I heard exclamations of horror from Carson and Howland and Trent above as they, too, saw him. Then his head had vanished inside the window, and it flashed on me that he was sounding the alarm. But even as I thought so, he had reappeared beneath, metal bars in his own grasp like our own, bars which he was inserting in the holes beneath like ourselves, one above the other!

He was coming up the wall after us!

SWINGING swiftly up, bar after bar, from hole to to hole, he was coming up beneath me, and was swiftly drawing nearer toward me, while I gazed down toward him transfixed with horror. Then the cries of Carson and Howland, above, aroused me, and I thrust my bars into the holes above me, began with frantic efforts to climb faster after them. Up—up—swiftly, frantically, I climbed, but ever closer to me drew that monstrous form beneath, thrusting his own bars in the holes and swinging up upon them with ease on his great taloned limbs. Above me I could see that Carson and the others were already passing up over the inward-slanting facet of the wall, climbing up that inward facet with drill and bars working swiftly, and I knew that once I reached its slope, instead of the vertical wall to which I now clung, I might progress up faster, might elude the creature beneath. Up—up—I dared not look down toward the pursuing turtle-creature, as with pounding heart and bursting lungs I clambered upward. At last I was but a few yards beneath the inward slope of the wall, Howland already upon that slope. And it was just then that something gripped my ankles tightly, and I looked down to see that the creature beneath had reached me and had grasped me!

As that grip tightened about my feet I dropped suddenly downward from the bar I held to the one which my feet had rested upon, and there, clinging to that bar with the turtle-creature pulling himself up, I struck out savagely at him, felt his own great blows falling upon me as he struggled up to the bar upon which I clung. There, both clinging to that single slender metal bar, projecting from the mighty building's vertical side, we swayed in such a giddy combat as few have imagined. Striking with all our power at each other, the one aim of both of us was to break the other's hold upon the bar, to send him hurtling down to death on the metal base of the great building, hundreds of feet below. And with his first blows the turtle-creature almost accomplished that, since those blows took me off balance for a moment and after tottering for an instant, I had slipped sidewise off the bar, was holding to it with but one hand.

Just then something gripped my ankles tightly, and I looked down to see that the creature beneath had reached me and had grasped me

As I dangled thus from the bar, the monster clinging to it, raising his arm for a blow that would knock me completely loose from it, I heard the horrified cries of Howland and the others above, saw them climbing down toward me with their bars, saw also the cold smooth metal at the base of the great structure, far below. Then, even as the arm of my opponent swung up for a finishing blow, I had hooked my knees swiftly up over the bar, clung with them in the next moment as we

struck and thrust at each other wildly again. And even as we did so, in that next moment, I became conscious of something that made the blood run cold in my veins. The bar was giving beneath our combined weight!

The slender metal bar, strong enough to support one, was bending now beneath the combined weight of the turtle-creature and myself, and in a moment more would send both of us hurtling downward as it gave completely. Even as it bent slowly downward beneath us, though, we two struck and made toward each other, slipping gradually toward the bar's outer end as it bent downward, slipping until, still struggling madly, we were clinging to its very end. Then it bent suddenly, completely downward, beneath our weight and we had slipped off it, hurtling downward! Yet at the very instant that we did so a hand had reached down from above, had gripped my collar, my shoulder, and had drawn me slowly up to the bar above, while the hideous form of my opponent went hurtling downward with a deep scream!

Down, down, twisting and turning, he fell and in a moment we could see him strike the bare stretch of metal at the building's base, unobserved it seemed by any in the masses that filled the streets beyond. I turned, trembling, to find that it was Howland who had saved me, who had clambered down from above to catch me just as the bar gave way. Now he removed the strain upon the bar on which he had pulled me by climbing to that above, and then Carson and I too began climbing down to assure themselves of my safety. We resumed our climb up the wall. Within minutes, moving up in the same order and by the same method as before, we had passed up over the slant of the wall, and were climbing more easily up the hundred feet or more that remained between us and the roof.

Up and up we went, Carson above leading steadily with the drill we moving up after him with our bars, moving up with all the powers of our tired bodies, now, since well we knew that the minutes left to us were rapidly drawing to an end. All about us the great moon-city lay in the shrouding dusk unchanged, the flying-circles massed still upon all the buildings about us, but we knew that within minutes the three great signal notes from the plaza would be sounding to bring all the hordes inside those buildings and upon the one up which we climbed, out upon their flying-circles and toward the plaza and the cylinders and disk beyond it. So it was almost frenziedly that we followed Carson on our strange and terrible climb upward, until at last he, the highest of us, was within a few feet of the great building's roof.

Pausing there, he motioned cautiously down toward us, and as we listened we heard faintly from that roof the sound of deep bass turtle-creatures' voices—many of them apparently. Carson then raised his head slowly above the level of the roof, peering across it and clinging to the topmost bar he had just mastered. Tensely we waited while he gazed over the roof, for were we discovered a single blow would send each of us to eternity. Then Carson gazed down toward us again, his eyes motioning us to follow, then he drew himself gently upward through the dusk and over the great roof's edge, over until he had disappeared from our view on that roof.

IN a moment Trent had followed him, and was soon peering across the roof. Howland followed and I was moving up toward the topmost bar after him. I reached it and slowly raised my eyes above the level of the roof. Its vast expanse of hundreds of feet stretched away into the dusk before me, from the edge at which I crouched, and I saw that upon its surface were ranged scores of great flying-circles that were partially overlapping or piled upon each other. They were loaded with instruments and equipment, and I saw that each had been fitted with four of the great ray-hemispheres, at regular intervals around each of the circles. In them were no turtle-creatures. Their crews, their forces, were still in the great building beneath us, but at the opening at the roof's center from which the stair led downward, there waited a full score of armed turtle-guards!

Carson and Trent and Howland had drawn themselves over the roof's edge and were crouching now behind a great mass of bulky metal-like equipment that lay between us and the flying-circles, between us and the guards at the central opening. Swiftly, then, with a glance toward those guards I followed their example, drew myself up upon the roof and crept stealthily and silently across an open space to the shelter of those metal-like forms, crouching down behind them with my friends. Then, drawing us to him, Carson whispered to us tensely.

"We'll have to make for one of the flying-circles!" he whispered. "It will bring us out of the view of the guards but in the case they may not see us, and we've hardly minutes left!"

"I'll try to get to the nearest one, then," said Howland, nodding toward it. "It's now or never!"

So, crouching for a moment there behind our shelter with our eyes searching, we crept out from behind that shelter out on the open roof toward the nearest of the great flying-circles. We were within full view of the guards at the great roof's center. I threw over through the twilight dusk, and I prayed that they might not turn toward us as we crept toward the great flying-circle's edge. The guards, though, seemed to be gazing intently down the opening at the stairway beneath, and in a moment we had reached the great flat craft's edge, were stepping silently over its low protecting wall, toward the central cylinders that controlled it. Heart beating wildly, I led the way toward that nearest one, my eyes upon the cylinders that controlled the flying-craft's motive power, and in moments more, moments that seemed eternities to us, we had reached that low platform at its center upon which were the controls. Then my hands were reaching toward those controls, toward the starting studs, were——

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Deliberately, majestically, awfully, they had sounded out over the moon-city in that dread moment, the three great bell-notes from the plaza that summoned the moon-hordes to the chamber beneath the plaza and the disk and cylinders within it. Three mighty clanging notes of doom, precursors of that last great note that would send the moon-hordes flashing down to earth! Three titanic notes at which we, upon the flying-circle's center, crouched transfixed, and at which there came a hurrying rush of many feet from beneath! Then in the next stunned moment there had burst up through the opening from beneath masses of turtle-creatures hurrying toward the flying-circles. Even as they emerged upon the roof, they and the guards had seen us, all at the same instant. They stopped short, stared through the dusk at us, and then their metal hemispheres had come up and a score of green shafts of the deadly vacuum ray were stabbing across the roof toward us!

CHAPTER XIII

Howland's Way!

IT was at the very moment that the moon-creatures had trained their hemispheres upon us that my hands had grasped certain of the controls of the great flying-circle on which we crouched and it was that alone that saved us in that moment. For

even as the green beams drove across the roof toward us there had come the smooth powerful throbbing of the craft's mechanism and I had jerked the central control upward, sending the flying-circle leaping upward, just as the deadly beams reached the spot where we had been. The next moment there came terrific thundering detonations from beneath us as those rays and a score of others that stabbed toward us as we rose, created great vacuums beneath us. Then our flying-circle was above the roof and was driving upward in the dusk with a wild uproar rising from beneath and all around us.

For across all the mighty moon-city, now, in answer to the summons of those three great notes, turtle-creatures in hordes were pouring up on the roofs, were filling their great flying-circles and slanting up in those circles all about us! And from those and the flying-circles on the great roof beneath, that were rising now after us, there came a dull roar of deep voices as they saw our own craft, we four crouching at its center, driving up through the dusk above the mighty city. Almost at once, it seemed, we had been seen by all those hundreds, those thousands, of great flat craft, and they were driving toward us, were flocking thickly from all directions upon us, great masses of the turtle-creatures visible on them!

"The plaza!" Howland was screaming above the great throbbing of our craft. "Make for the plaza—for the disk! It's a matter of minutes now till the end—till the last bell-note sounds!"

But already my hands had tightened on the control and at its full speed I was sending the great flying-circle hurtling through the dusk above the great faceted buildings, above the mighty moon city, to that plaza and that disk that was the objective of all the swarming flying-circles about us. Swiftly, as we shot on, I pointed to Carson the four green studs beside me that controlled the green beams of the four hemispheres at the edge of our great flying-circle, and he crouched tensely beside those studs, watching, as the flying-circles about us drove closer. Like hornets aroused from their nest they seemed, swarming up in countless throngs all about and beneath us, across all the moon-city, and while it seemed madness to believe that we could reach the plaza and the disk with these hordes about us, yet with the recklessness of despair I sent the great circle splitting the air as it rushed toward the plaza.

Now flying-circles were closing in from either side, from below, and there came a hiss and flash of green misty beams from beneath and to the right, beams that drove past us as I whirled the circle to one side, and that detonated with terrific explosions about us, sending our craft reeling sidewise from them! And even as we righted ourselves and shot on again, from ahead three great circles that had caught our approach were rushing toward us and were whirling straight in our direction. I cried to Carson, dipped the great flying-circle suddenly downward, and then as we drove beneath them, our own beams had stabbed up and flashed across their surfaces as they sought to dip also, the massed turtle-creatures upon them swelling, scattering, from each other, exploding bodily as the green ray's detonation thundered about them!

NOW the air about us seemed filled with flying-circles, circles that were rushing toward us from every conceivable direction, from either side and above and below, whose great green beams were whirling madly through the air in an endeavor to stop our great rush toward the plaza, their own objective. Impossible it seemed that any could whirl through such a storm of flying-circles and stabbing beams and live, yet only conscious of the thundering hell of battle about us, I drove the circle onward across the great city, Carson playing symphonies of death upon the green studs before him as he sent our misty rays whirling to right and left and above, sending masses of the flying-circles it struck tumbling aimlessly downward into the city below, where the throngs of turtle-creatures were rushing through its streets at sight of this terrific battle above them!

But now behind us there drove down toward us a close-massed dozen of flying-circles whose beams, sweeping toward us, made me whirl our own craft lightning-like downward, down until we were rushing on over the moon-city clearing its faceted buildings by but a few feet, the close mass of our immediate pursuers directly behind us! Again their beams stabbed about us, and then as I swerved from them, an idea shot through my brain and I turned, saw that they were close behind, waited until they were but yards behind. Then, before they could loose their beams, I had dived sharply downward, swiftly followed by them. In the same moment that I had dipped downward, though, I had curved sharply up once more, and before they too could curve up, their flying-circles had smashed full against the side of one of the mighty faceted buildings!

And now upward we were slanting again, at awful speed, throbbing madly upward with the myriads of flying-circles rushing still from over all the moon city toward us, up and on across that city toward the plaza that was our goal! The swift rush of our mighty craft, the myriads of flying-circles that swooped toward us from all directions, the stab of our green rays and the thunder of detonations all about us, the hoarse shouts of Carson and Howland and Trent, all these merged in my ears into one dull great roar as with a madness of battle strong within me I sent our great craft rocketing onward. Lightning-like we flashed ahead, the great moon city beneath us giving forth a vast insensate roar of anger and alarm as we shot across it, the flying-circles about us driving still toward us from all directions with beams wildly whirling. Then from ahead, other great masses of flying-circles, crowded with turtle-creatures, were flashing toward us, and before I could swerve our rushing craft two of those onrushing ones ahead were full before us! In that instant a collision seemed inevitable, but with a wild jerk I brought the control-lever upward, just in time to raise our flying-circle a foot above the level of the onrushing ones. And the next instant we had flashed across both of them at that height, our own metal circle mowing the thick-packed creature from the surface of theirs as a scythe might do with grain!

But now Howland was shouting hoarsely in my ear. "The plaza!" he was crying. "There ahead—and the opening!"

But there far ahead now I saw it, the great clear flat circle with the great black-glittering disk set in it, the big opening near it, and I nodded swiftly. "We'll make it yet!" I cried to him. "We'll land beside the opening—beside the switch!"

For now our great flying-circle had shot forward from among the masses of thick-swarming craft whose beams were raking about us, and hampered as they were by their very numbers, we leaped ahead of them, rushed down toward the great plaza's surface, toward the opening at the side of which was the great switch. Upon the plaza itself and beneath there seemed to be no turtle-creatures whatever, since we knew that all had just started toward it from across the great moon-city. When our escape had given the alarm, all had been diverted from their course and were coming toward us instead. And now, as we shot down toward it, toward the great opening, the myriads of deadly beams, that had thundered and flashed about us for the last

moments in a hell of vacuum death, ceased abruptly, and I understood instantly that because we were so close to their great disk and switch, the turtle-creatures could not loose more rays upon us without fear of striking and destroying their own switch and great mechanism!

Down we shot and then the next moment the great flying-circle had come to the plaza's surface beside the big opening and we were leaping from it toward that opening. The air above seemed full of flying-circles now, all the great forces of the moon massing to flash down within seconds from the great disk on the mighty beam, and as they saw us rush toward the opening, their own disks shot madly downward, to land beside that opening and rush after us, still fearing to use their rays! But now we had reached the great switch at the opening's side, whose throw upward or downward sent the mighty beam upward or downward from the disk, and now Howland had laid hold of that switch!

"Down into the cylinder!" he cried to us. "The bell-note will sound in a second and I'll turn on the beam!"

CARSON and Trent and I hesitated a moment, even in that mad moment when from all about the plaza the moon-creatures were rushing in hordes toward us, from their landing flying-circles, then flung ourselves down the narrow stair and into the great chamber beneath the plaza, across the narrow metal bridge and through the open door of the mighty cylinder that hung still in the framework beneath the disk, poised above the great shaft. We threw ourselves inside it, Carson's hand on the stud that would snap the cylinder's door shut when Howland should turn on the beam and rush down into the cylinder with us, and then as we looked back up, we saw Howland's hand tightening upon that great switch, saw the moon-creatures, the turtle-hordes, rushing from all about, and almost upon him, and then the next moment had come the terrific clanging note of the great automatic bell-signal, marking the moment when the disk on earth and this disk on the moon were in line! Even as that note clanged, Howland had flung the great switch. But as we saw him do it, we cried out hoarsely, heard the awful cries of the turtle-creatures throwing themselves upon him as they too saw, heard across all the mighty moon-world a great dull roar as though of utter fear!

For Howland had flung the switch upward!

In the next instant, the great disk above us had hummed with terrific power and then its beam had shot from it, but that beam had shot *upward!* Had driven up with all its awful power toward the great transparent roof far above! There came in that instant, as it struck that roof, crashed through it, shattered it, a great roar of wind, a titanic thunderous roaring of all the air upon the moon-world, rushing out into airless space through that great puncture which the mighty beam had made in the roof! I saw Howland's hand flung down toward us in a supreme gesture even as the thunderous roar of the outrushing air came to us, heard Carson click shut the cylinder's door at the same instant in answer to that gesture, that agonized command, and then in the succeeding instant Howland had flung the switch back and *downward!*

There came again a terrific humming from the disk above us, our cylinder seeming to hang poised beneath that disk for an instant while the air outside it, the air in the great chamber and above it, the air of all the moon-world rushed out into the airless vacuum of space through the gigantic puncture in the roof far above. In that moment, through the great opening above, we saw Howland and the turtle-creatures about him swaying, staggering, falling, as with a thunderous roar as of riven worlds the air-tight moon-world's air rushed forth above, asphyxiating all life upon it in that one tremendous moment! Falling singly, in groups, in masses, above and over all the great moon-world, over all the colossal city of the turtle-creatures, dying as all in the moon-world were dying in that moment!

Howland's way! I cried it aloud in that moment, as our cylinder hung poised beneath the humming disk, as Howland and all the millions of the moon hordes sank to death above us with the rush of the moon-world's air out into space. Howland's way! The way of which he had spoken there to us in our prison; the one by which the menace of the turtle-creatures could be removed forever! He had slain all the turtle-races on the moon with one great blow as they had slain the worm-folk eons before, using the great disk and beam, which they had meant to use to transport their hordes to the conquest of other worlds! The way that had meant the sacrifice of himself, yet out of which sacrifice he had reached at last to save us three, to fling the switch downward! For even at the moment that I cried out, that the moon-world above us sank down to one great death, the humming disk beneath which our cylinder poised shot forth its beam again but *downward* now, driving our cylinder down into the darkness of the great shaft!

Clinging beside Carson and Trent there at its bottom, I was aware through darkening senses of the cylinder clicking down through darkness with velocity inconceivable; of its bursting out into flaming light in another instant; of hurtling through spaces unthinkable, gemmed with burning stars, toward a tremendous brown sphere that was growing lightning-like before us. Then new dazzling light was breaking about us from ahead, I seemed pressed by a giant hand to the cylinder's floor as its awful speed slowed up, and then as the light vanished and the cylinder came to rest, I heard the click of its door opening. The next moment I could feel Carson's hands on me, could hear the voices of him and Trent beside me, and then complete darkness enveloped me, and I knew no more.

CHAPTER XIV

Epilogue

NIGHT lay still over the face of the earth when Carson and Trent and I finally reached the summit of the great mound, into whose shaft our cylinder had dropped. It had been hours before that we had shot down out of the gulf of space into that shaft, coming to rest upon the great disk from which we had started on our momentous journey. All, we found, was as it had been when we had shot outward into the gulf twenty-four hours before, the great disk unchanged, our rope-ladder hanging still into the shaft from above. And it was up that ladder, after Carson and Trent had revived me and we had rested, that we had come, until now we stood upon the great mound's summit once more.

Standing together there, motionless and silent, we gazed out. In the black vault of the heavens overhead there burned the brilliant tropic stars, but it was not toward these that Carson and Trent and I were gazing —it was toward the brilliant silver disk of the full moon, sinking down now toward the western horizon with the passing of night—a shining shield which we three watched in silence, gazing out toward it over the moon-lit jungles. Toward its craters and seas and mountain ranges, toward that great central crater through which our cylinder had flashed on our mad journey through the moon to its other side in search of Howland, and back through which we had flashed to earth, with How-

(*Continued on page* 571)

When the *Earth*

By Paul H. Lovering

"NECESSITY," it is said, "is the mother of invention." Just how true this statement is can be judged by the fact that almost simultaneously with the realization of some certain need, we hear of a new invention to answer that need. In this age, machines and mechanical devices for labor-saving purposes hold the greatest sway. And more and more man is imitating or perhaps duplicating Nature. We have oxygen in tanks to sustain life in airtight submarines. We have "bottled sunshine" for cures. We are even talking of synthetic food and synthetic life. Can it be because we may sometime—perhaps in the far future—have a need for those things? And how far can we proceed without the aid of Nature?

Effective Chemicals

"THIS is the mechanism by which I hope to communicate with other worlds."

"Eustace Maynard, why waste your time on such absurd experiments?"

Professor William Brown of Covard University laughed the sting from his reproof.

"What is their value?" he continued. "From a scientific viewpoint, they possess a certain interest, I admit, but who would hop from this comfortable earth for Mars or Venus, when there is such obvious likelihood he would hop, at the same time, from this mortal coil—assuming," he hastened to add, "that your efforts should be crowned with the success you anticipate and communication with other worlds really is possible?"

"Your own literary journeys into the future furnish the best justification for my work," Maynard rallied. "You prophecy that some day the earth will grow as cold and dead as the moon. Posterity then might be glad to record its last will and testament with thinking creatures on another planet."

"You have me there," the professor admitted. "I must admit I am a prophet who believes his own prophecies. Emigration from earth to some other world would be very desirable in the event, that our own sphere became a dreary, ice-shackled waste. However, that will not happen in our day."

He blew smoke rings toward the rocky top of the cave, in which the young millionaire, following an unhappy love experience, had immured himself while conducting his bizarre experiments. Memory of that episode in Maynard's life provoked a question.

"How's Miriam?"

"I've heard she and Bobby Winstead are not altogether happy, but that may be only gossip, of course. I've seen their little son. He's a beautiful child."

"Very beautiful," Brown acquiesced. Then, after a pause: "Do you know, Eustace, I think you are doing yourself an injustice. You should come out of this strange, air-tight cave and mingle with the world. You are wasting your life here."

"I can't agree with that statement. I prefer research and solitude. Why should I mingle with the crowd if I prefer to be alone?"

"You have certain duties to society. If nothing more, you should dissipate a larger portion of your increasing wealth." Brown tempered his remark with a smile. "Further, while solitude works changes in men, it never yet has proved a balm for the heart."

With obvious intent to shift the conversation, the younger man directed attention to a massive iron cylinder, only partially concealed behind heavy hangings. It was conical in form and pierced by three openings, two windows at about the height of a man and a door near the base.

"There's the messenger I intend sending to some other world."

"I didn't know you had gone so far in your experiments. Can you really overcome the pull of gravity on such a huge mass?"

"Were the proper chemicals united in combination in its base, it would smash its way through the rock above and speed into the unknown at a rate as fast as that of light. I intend to launch it within a week but, needless to say, not from my favorite cave. I have selected another spot on this estate, where I still will be free from prying eyes. The cylinder will be freighted with communications and instructions in geometric code, which will enable the inhabitants of any sphere on which it falls to send it back to earth, provided they possess mentality and some scientific knowledge."

The professor examined the massive mechanism with interest and respect.

"Why not send an emigrant in it?"

"That would be possible. It's large enough to accommodate two or three persons. But, I might have some difficulty finding a person willing to make the jaunt. I couldn't guarantee a round trip."

Brown nodded and indicated a large glass cabinet filled with jars.

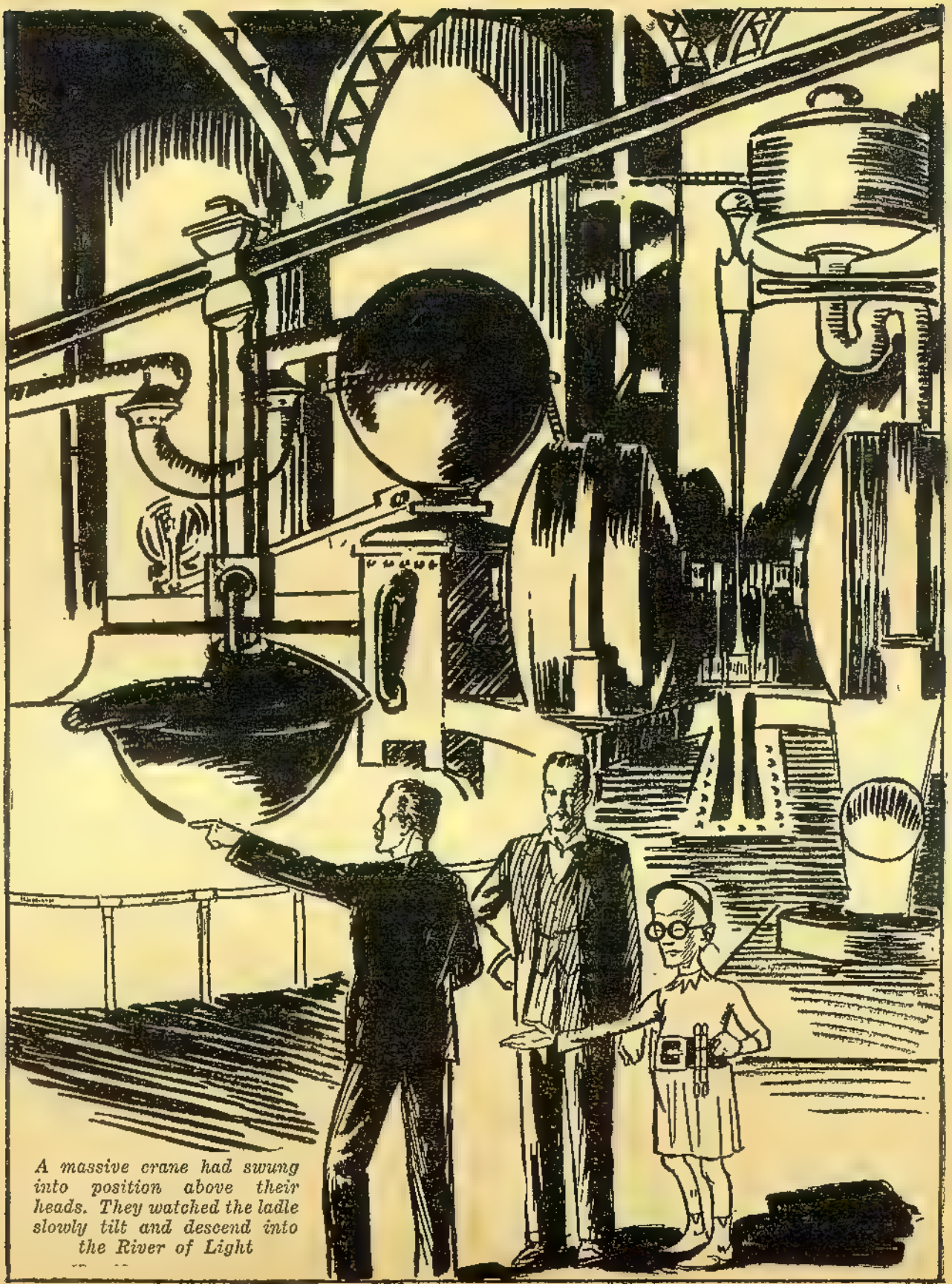
"You guard your chemicals with great care."

"Naturally," Maynard replied, drily. "I rather like this cave and have no desire to see a section of it go sailing off into space. Futhermore, the chemicals have an inexplicable power of suspending animation, and, at the same time, arresting decomposition. I discovered this wholly by accident. I really believe they would maintain life in the body for an indefinite period without any physical change."

He directed a strong light on a sealed cabinet resting on a rocky ledge. In it reposed two dogs, seemingly asleep.

"Do you recognize Rex and Queen? To all intents and purposes, they have been dead more than four years. However, I am confident both will come out of that sealed coffin alive and as well as the day I

Grew Cold



A massive crane had swung into position above their heads. They watched the ladle slowly tilt and descend into the River of Light

locked them in and put them to sleep with my chemical."

HE snapped the seals on the box and lifted the glass top. A pungent odor swept into their faces. For interminable seconds, the limp forms exhibited no signs of life. Abruptly, Queen's ears quivered and, at the same moment, Rex opened his eyes, drew a long, gasping breath and tottered to his feet.

"Resuscitated after four years of apparent death!" exclaimed Brown. "This is the age's greatest miracle."

Eustace patted Queen and the dog lurched to its feet. A moment later, she leaped from the casket and joined Rex, who was slowly trying out unaccustomed muscles in hesitating journeys around the cave. The men watched silently as the animals moved about the place, visibly growing stronger each second.

"Rex!" Maynard called.

The handsome creature leaped up and placed both forefeet on his chest. Then, with joyous bark, it raced up and down the cavern.

The dogs, every nerve aglow with vitality, simultaneously sprang toward him. One heavy body collided with the glass cabinet in which they had been confined during their years of slumber. It toppled from its resting place.

"Catch it, professor! Don't let it hit the chemical cabinet!"

Maynard sprang forward to avert the catastrophe. Too late! The massive casket smashed its way through the glass of the cabinet. There was a mild explosion.

"Run!" Eustace gasped, stumbling toward the cave entrance.

An iron door barred his way. Madly, he clawed at familiar locks, his brain numbed by the sweet, pungent odor that filled the apartment. Despairingly, he glanced behind him. Brown had sunk to the floor, his face calm and peaceful.

"What have I done?" he murmured despairingly, head sinking upon chest.

Still clutching vainly at the door fastenings, he dropped to the rocky floor. Silence reigned in the cave.

The Awakening

MAYNARD was awakened by a heavy shock. He stretched out his hands to brace himself and touched something soft and warm. How tired he felt—not exactly tired, either, but disinclined to exert himself sufficiently to open his eyes. After a long pause, he rolled over and slowly raised reluctant lids. The cave was filled with subdued light, reminiscent of moonlight but less metallically silver in color. Still drugged with sleep, he pieced together the memories stirring in his unsteady brain. This was his workshop, but what was that jagged opening in the cave wall, through which poured the soft radiance? Who was the sleeper by his side? He stirred unwilling muscles and dragged the man into the light.

"Professor Brown!"

The familiar countenance of the Covard instructor brought a flood of recollection.

"What happened after that chemical explosion?" he murmured aloud.

He ran a hand perplexedly through his hair. Fine dust rained over his clothing.

"Heavens only knows how long we slept. Perhaps, it was for days."

The professor flung out his arms and opened his eyes.

"What a dream!" he yawned, lurching to his feet.

"I seemed to see centuries pass in procession."

He rubbed sleep-heavy lids.

"It was all so confoundedly real, too," he added. "Where are we? Oh, I remember, now. That infernal stuff of yours exploded and the fumes overpowered us."

He peered about uncertainly.

"Let's get out into the sunshine. No more experimenting for me!"

He aroused the dogs while Eustace hunted the iron portal. It had disappeared. Only jagged rocks met his fingers.

"The door has disappeared," he announced, a queer catch in his voice.

"Impossible! Only an earthquake could have wrecked it."

"I was awakened by a shock. It may have been a slight earthquake. That opening up there is new. I never saw it before."

"One way's as good another," Brown grumbled, good-naturedly, "so long as it leads to breakfast. I'm famished."

He clambered on a pile of small rocks and dirt, thrust his head through the ragged opening and, after a pause, called back over his shoulder.

"I can see sunlight in the distance. The cave mouth is not far away."

Eustace hoisted the dogs through the opening and climbed out himself. They found a rough and uneven pathway, which descended steadily.

"That earthquake evidently opened up new caverns, of which we had no previous knowledge," Brown remarked. "This will make an interesting addition to a paper describing your discoveries and our experiences."

Rex and Queen, who had ventured far ahead, could be heard barking, the noise reverberating as though echoed on and on for a long distance. The men came to an abrupt turn in the narrow passage. The light had grown visibly brighter.

"We are nearing the entrance," the professor asserted confidently.

He stepped out briskly and a moment later, Maynard heard him calling to the dogs.

"Every hair on their bodies is standing up straight," he explained, over his shoulder. "What's the matter, Rex? Get it!"

The animals howled dismally.

"Confound it, shut up! Eustace, the dogs have lost their nerve as a result of your devilish experiments."

He moved on again, Rex and Queen trailing Maynard's heels. The light grew brighter. Another turn in the narrow cave and Eustace bumped into the tense form of his friend.

"What's that?" the latter exclaimed in a low voice.

Maynard stood on tip-toe and looked over Brown's shoulder. They were standing at the entrance of a vast cavern, seemingly deserted but flooded by the soft, dull brillance they had mistaken for daylight.

"There!"

The professor pointed with trembling finger.

"What's that?"

Through the center of the cavern raced, at indescribable speed, a river, not of water but of luminosity. It broke in a spray of light against rocky banks, eddied about projecting boulders and swept into the distance, as far as the eye could follow it, a flood of golden brilliance.

"A river of light," Eustace gasped. "Am I dreaming?"

"One more sniff of your chemicals and we would be

seeing pink elephants," Brown commented, caustically. "Wait a minute! Do you see something over there—among those giant mushrooms?"

"It can't be true, of course, professor—but they look like human dwarfs."

The rank, white vegetation seemed alive with forms. From behind the giant stalks, pygmies darted out to the number of two score or more.

"We took one pinch too much," Brown groaned. "We passed the pink elephant stage."

The little men advanced rapidly. They were slenderly formed, with capacious heads, attenuated bodies and slender limbs.

"If all this is not a dream," the professor exclaimed, "I'm a fit subject for examination by a lunacy commission."

One of the dwarfs, more venturesome than his fellows, pulled at the speaker's sleeve. The educator gingerly fingered the flabby little hand. Doubt gave way to astonishment.

"They're real, Eustace."

He turned an amazed face to his companion.

"This is the greatest discovery of the generation! We have found an unknown and buried human race!"

A dwarf, who seemed the leader of the strange crew, motioned them on through the fields of wraith-like vegetation, toward the luminous river.

"It flows with amazing speed," Eustace remarked, "yet makes no noise."

Brown nodded assent but whispered a warning.

"I don't like the looks of these little chaps."

"Neither do I, but they don't seem to be armed."

THE professor paused to examine the strange vegetation through which they were passing.

"I am tempted to believe they are cultivated. Note the regularity of the rows. We must be crossing a farm of this amazing people."

"You may be right, professor, but I should feel more disposed to scientific observation if I had any idea where we were going."

"That's right," Brown ejaculated, his booming laugh resounding hollowly through the cavern. "For the moment, I was so interested in our amazing discoveries I forgot breakfast. I wonder where these little rascals are leading us."

"I'm anxious to find an exit to the surface and the way they indicate seems to go deeper into the cavern."

They shot rapid-fire questions at the dwarfs, exhausting their knowledge of languages and even resorting to signs without avail. The pygmy leader went ahead impatiently to the brink of the luminous river and beckoned.

"We can be in no greater danger there than here," the professor argued. "Let's see what he wants."

Below them, the brilliant flood eddied and boiled. Scintillating haze floated over the gleaming mass, from which subdued light radiated.

"Reminds me of a mist such as one observes at times hanging over a large body of water on a clear, hot summer day," Brown observed.

"What do you suppose it is?"

The Covard instructor thrust his cupped hand into the flood.

"Whatever it is, it's warm.

He lifted his hand. It was empty. Only a gentle radiance surrounded it for a moment.

"Odd! Very odd!"

He dabbled in the stream again but abruptly snatched out his fingers and shook them frantically.

"That time it burned! What do you suppose made it do that?"

The dwarfs, with impatient thrusts, now urged them downstream.

"It's time we decided our course," Eustace declared. "Their intentions may be friendly but, frankly, I don't like the looks. Shall we go with them and take chances, or shall we turn back?"

Another party of dwarfs emerged from the rank white vegetation. Several carried bundles.

"There is one of their women, Maynard. Not bad looking, either."

The girl paused as she came opposite them. Something in the proud poise of her beautiful head reminded Eustace, for a bitter moment, of Miriam, the woman he had loved and lost. She seemed almost of a different race than her companions, being taller and apparently superior mentally. Abruptly, she broke through the ranks surrounding her, jostling one of the newcomers so the contents of his sack were flung to the floor. Brown recoiled in horror.

"The miserable little runts are cannibals!"

Eustace thrust aside detaining hands and started back over the path they had traveled.

With a gasp of horror, the girl caught at his hand.

"Save me!" she pleaded. "These creatures captured me and are carrying me to their own caverns."

Amazement at hearing familiar speech under these astonishing circumstances was subordinated to the need for action. The dwarfs seized the girl, but they were flung aside by Maynard. Sheltering her with their bodies, the men retreated from the river bank. Instantly, the pygmies attacked. Small, clammy hands clutched at limbs and clothing. A thrust was sufficient to send an assailant reeling, but their numbers were formidable. Eustace, beset on every side, staggered and would have fallen had Rex and Queen not created a diversion by charging the pygmies, slashing at their attenuated legs with sharp teeth and filling the cavern with angry baying.

Maynard and Brown at first had made every effort not to injure their foes, who seemed unarmed, but the labor of flinging off their insistent bodies was exhausting. Eustace caught up one of the men and whirled him like a club. Those smitten by his frightful weapon did not clamber so nimbly to their feet. The attack slackened.

"I believe we've whipped them," he gasped.

"Great Heavens! Eustace, look behind you!"

Another party, as numerous as the first, had dashed from the mushrooms.

"Smash 'em!" cried Maynard, shaking his terrible club.

The new group passed to one side and the cannibals fled, several falling victims to the explosion of glass bombs hurled by the strange war party. The leader of the latter, a man above the average height of his people, approached the watchful little group. His face mirrored surprise and curiosity as he addressed the girl.

"Who are these two giants, Mir?"

He spoke a form of English, clipped and odd-sounding but intelligible.

"I do not know," she replied. "I was captured and they rescued me."

He drew himself up smartly and saluted.

"I thank you, on behalf of my people."

Curiosity broke through the restraint that seemed habitual with this strange race.

"Where come you?" he demanded.

"From another cave," Brown replied, "not far away."

"Do others live there?"

"Not there, but millions more are on the earth's surface."

Amazement and unbelief were expressed on the soldier's face.

"Nothing lives on the earth's surface," he declared.

The professor laughed.

"Only yesterday, I came from the city of New York, where several millions of people live very comfortably on the earth's surface."

"New York!" echoed the dwarf. "The great city of our fathers! It was destroyed in the upheaval of 16,002."

A Glimpse of the Surface

"NEW YORK destroyed! In 16002! Absurd!" The professor laughed, but the mirth died on his lips as the little man regarded him sadly.

"You are the last New Yorkers. Before the earth had grown cold, your great city was overwhelmed by a tidal wave. At least, so our traditions tell us. Nothing now remains of it save a memory."

"Impossible!"

The dwarf leader replied with a dignified gesture closing the discussion.

"The Thinker will tell you more."

He turned to Eustace, who had been studying the strange glass bombs suspended in a bandolier across his chest.

"They contain gas which induces sleep but does not kill," he said. "They are the only arms we permit ourselves and are effective enough against our sole foes, the cannibals you have seen. With the world slowly dying, we cannot bring ourselves to kill even such miserable specimens of humanity."

He indicated the direction whence his column had come.

"They raided one of our fields and carried off Mir, the Thinker's daughter. That is why we pursued them. But for your intervention, they might have vanished in their distant caverns, with which even we are not acquainted. Before you return to your own caves, may I extend hospitality to you and your companions?"

"We shall be pleased to accept, particularly if you will show us a way to the surface."

The dwarf smiled.

"I know a way. Follow me."

As they turned into a beaten path paralleling the course of the mysterious river, Mir caught Maynard's hand, pressed it to her lips and fled on ahead. They had entered a narrower passage, at the bottom of which the river tossed and whirled in silent, iridiscent majesty. They could see to the rugged ceiling, composed of many down-hanging points of rock, gilded by the soft radiance emanating from the mysterious stream. At a point where the cavern walls came down almost to its banks, a detachment of their escort stopped, but the remainder of the command continued onward.

"How straight the channel runs," Eustace remarked. "One would think its bed had been cut from the solid rock."

"I can hardly conceive of these dwarfs carrying on such a tremendous project."

"They may not have been so small," Maynard replied, with a whimsical smile, "when they entered the caves."

"You don't believe their absurd stories about the destruction of life on the earth's surface," Brown exclaimed. "I don't."

"I hardly know what to believe. The story seems absurd, but it is no more fantastic than ours will be."

"I'll be glad," the professor sighed, "when we get out of this place."

"So will I. For the moment, we can only go on. Our host is friendly. Think what a paper you will have for the next meeting of the National Anthropological Society. A lost race of whites, inhabiting these amazing caverns and speaking English. It will startle the scientific world."

"I see you agree with me that his story about the destruction of life in New York is a weird dream."

"I know that I hope it is."

"Eustace, it's impossible!"

Brown's mellow laugh filled the cavern with echoes.

"I'm willing to admit the whole thing is puzzling," he continued, "but the fact we are here is proof there is nothing to the idea that the world has grown cold."

"Yet, you once predicted such an end to all things mundane."

"Agreed, but you will recall I added nothing of the sort could happen in our day."

The cavern had opened out separately, its further extreme cloaked in shadows. They were passing again though long, orderly rows of mushroom-like growths.

"These, I presume, are your fields," said the Covard instructor to their guide.

"Yes."

THE man's manner suggested a suspicion that the speaker was jesting. Brown changed the subject.

"Have you a name for this odd stream, this river of light."

"That is its name—the River of Light. Have you nothing like it in your caves?"

"No."

"How do you obtain light and heat?"

"From the sun, of course."

"The sun? Has it again commenced to give off light and heat?"

Doubt and pitiful eagerness were mingled in the question.

"So far as I know, it never ceased giving off both."

The little man flung a question at him.

"What year do you think this is?"

"Why, A. D. 1938."

The dwarf laughed shrilly.

"This," he cried, "is A. D. 28,989."

"Preposterous!" Brown exclaimed.

For the first time, their guide displayed resentment.

"Among my people," he said sharply, "liars are unknown."

"I do not question your veracity," the professor hastened to explain. "However, my companion and I went to sleep on August 26, 1938. We woke up today. If what you say is true, we have slept—Merciful Providence!—We have slept more than 20,000 years."

"I do not know how long you have slept or if you have slept at all," the little man replied haughtily. "Nevertheless, I assure you that this is 28,989, according to the computations of time in use from the earliest days of the American people."

"You speak of the American people—who are your people?"

Their guide raised his head with melancholy pride.

"We are the last Americans."

"We, also, are Americans. If what you say is true, we are the sole survivors of our branch."

"There are none others in your cave."

"Not one."

"You once lived on the earth's surface?"

"We were born on the earth's surface and lived there until we went to sleep in August, 1938."

"Earth then was habitable? People lived on its surface?"

"Yes."

The little man threw up his hands in a gesture of despair.

"This matter is too deep for me. We must place it before the Thinker. For more than 12,000 years, this has been the sole home of the remnant of the American people. In those savages you met a short time ago, you saw all else of humanity that is left in the world, so far as we are aware. You two, alone, possess the stature and general characteristics of our ancient race."

He paused a moment, in deep thought.

"Greater men than I must take up the tale. However, to convince you that I and they speak the truth, you shall look upon the outer world, where you once lived."

He turned aside into an inclined path that wound round and round, as though they were ascending a massive stone column in the manner of a spiral staircase. Presently, they came to a flight of steps, each so high their guide had trouble mounting them.

"They were hewed from the living rock by men of your stature," he explained.

A feeling of unreality, mingled with foreboding, weighed down the others. They were silent as they toiled upward interminably, pausing occasionally to regain breath. A tiny light-stream, a mere trickle compared with the river below, leaped and glistened beside them, illuminating the never-ending stairway.

"When you tire," their guide observed, "we will rest. It is some distance to the top."

For the first time, they heard the subdued clank of machinery.

"You hear the light condensers," the little man explained. "You will see them in a few moments."

They entered a spacious cavern filled with shining machinery, all in smooth, even motion. With little vibration, giant wheels turned in constant revolution and heavy bars rose and fell. They were amazed to observe the proportions of the mechanism. It towered above them. Their guide shouted and a thin, clear voice answered. High up in the maze of ironwork, they saw a moving dot.

"He is the Master Mechanician," the dwarf explained. "His whole life is dedicated to the task of keeping this machinery operating. By it, we are enabled to live. Were it to stop, we should die. These condensers supply the light that constitutes our source of heat, illumination and power, and also a sufficient amount to counterbalance loss due to earth absorption from the River."

Beneath the massive base of the machinery opened a pit. Peering down, they saw the iridescent stream, racing in a haze of brilliant spray over its rocky bed.

"Around this well is built the stairway we ascended. Through the pit we supply the stream."

A massive crane had swung into position above their heads. Its ponderous ladle slowly tilted and from the lip descended a stream of light. They watched the glistening trickle strike the river, sending up a brilliant mist spray.

"Here is the center of all the world's present life," their guide continued. "It is the pulsating heart of things, as we have known them for thousands of years. Were this machinery stilled, we should not survive long."

"I do not understand this River of Light," said the professor. "Is it liquid sunshine?"

He smiled as he asked the question.

"What it is is as much mystery to us as electricity was to your generation," the dwarf replied. "You had it, but only vaguely identified it as a force. We have this and know it as the River of Light."

He motioned them to a stone bench.

"YOU will understand more, perhaps, if I tell you that our scientists discovered the action of solar energy, concerning whose nature, as I remarked before, we know as little as you knew of electrical energy. They ascertained that this energy, in small quantity, was imparted during the day to the gaseous molecules of the atmosphere and, still more moderately, to the solid elements of earth. They also found it was the growth basis of all terrestrial life."

"Interesting theories," commented Brown. "Could their truth be demonstrated?"

"They, and we, are satisfied that their truth has been established. Their next problem was to discover means of molecular or atomic fixation that would preserve this life-giving energy and then to effect its translation into liquid form, because this was the obviously practical means of transportation through our caverns. Necessity, in all times, has been the father of inventive achievement. The means was found. A rough parallel between our problem and its solution may be found in your achievement of liquid air. The result, in our case, was the River of Light."

"How long does this process of fixation persist?" the professor queried.

"At first, the loss through earth absorption and atmospheric dissipation was enormous. However, succeeding generations of scientists perfected the application. As you may suspect," said the little man, with a melancholy smile, "time is nothing in our calculations. When a race is doomed and knows it is doomed, it does not spare effort to stave off annihilation."

He paused a moment, as though in meditation, and then continued.

"A certain degree of saturation has been reached in the earth's surface contiguous to the stream course through our caverns. Now, the absorptive loss is more or less established. Also, improved processes retard disintegration of the finished product as you see it in the River. Still, the percentage is formidable, particularly when the failing energy of the sun and our own steadily diminishing numbers of available workers are considered."

He rose and led them to a tall metal ladder, up which he clambered. They followed, finding some difficulty in accommodating their steps to its closely spaced rungs.

"We built this," he said, pausing at a landing. "You will observe it is not on so gigantic a scale as the machinery or the stone staircase."

The ladders seemed interminable, the platforms never-ending. Everywhere they observed silently whirring machinery and occasional workmen. Their guide paused at the bottom of a huge caisson.

"Step upon this movable platform," he commanded.

They were borne up swiftly into a triple-glassed chamber, similarly roofed and opening upon the surface of the earth.

"Why, it's winter!" exclaimed Brown.

"No," their guide corrected sadly. "If there were any important gradations of season now, it would be summer."

"But, everything is covered with snow."

"So it has been for thousands of years. The snow never disappears."

"But, when the moon goes down and the sun comes up, surely it must melt."

"The sun is 'up,' as you phrase it. That pallid orb

is the sun, which some of your ancient peoples worshipped, but none followed with such devotion as we."

"Do you mean to tell me that's the sun?"

"It is."

"Eustace, I was wrong," the professor cried, wildly. "What I predicted came true ages before I had believed it would be possible. The sun is going out and the earth has grown cold."

The Sun Is Fickle

STUNNED by the magnitude of the disaster by which they had been overwhelmed, Maynard and Brown stared at each other in hopeless dismay.

"We have slept through ages, during which the world's most momentous events have occurred," the former declared, after a pause.

The dwarf regarded him curiously.

"Imagination cannot suggest even the slightest part of those changes," he said, gravely. "The green, fertile, warm and rain-washed earth you knew is dead. In its place is the cold, sterile waste you have just viewed. We, descendants of the few Americans who escaped the Great Catastrophe, are hopelessly fighting a losing battle against what we know must be eventual destruction by cold."

He indicated a majestic snow column that reared itself, clear and distinct, in the distance above the level white plain that spread out on every side unbroken by a tree, shrub or other vegetation.

"This is a relic of the last big building in the ancient city of Chicago. That plain formerly was in your state of Illinois. In the Great Catastrophe, when other structures of your and our people were shaken down, fate spared this solitary sentinel. It towers above a frozen world and is the last and only creation of man surviving the titanic upheaval. It will stand forever. The snow never melts and cannot increase, because there is no moisture in the air. No winds disturb it, for the air is as dead as the rest of the world. We have come to a day of unchanging things. Only the sun is fickle. It grows darker with each passing year and some day, it will go out."

"What then?" Eustace demanded, in a strained voice.

"For a few years, the River of Light will flow, furnishing a scant measure of light and heat to our underground people and plants. Daily, a small part of its flow will be absorbed by the greedy earth. The last fateful struggle for existence will be launched. In the end, the stream will grow so small, it will no longer support life. The earth will whirl through space, a frozen sepulchre."

"Horrible!" shuddered Brown. "Yet, entirely understandable."

"We have confronted this certain fate for years," was the rejoinder.

The dwarf spoke with sad assurance.

"At first, we revolted against nature's inexorable decree. We supported ourselves with vain hopes that the temporary darkening of the sun would pass, that its glad heat would burst forth in former intensity, that the world once more would grow green and joyous. Generations ago, scientists convinced us of the folly of that hope. We have been awaiting the inevitable for centuries. By condensing such light as we may, we keep the River up to normal and even have increased its flow slightly. That is our own great labor and our only hope of even temporary survival."

"Why have you not migrated to another planet?" the professor inquired.

The dwarf bent a pitying gaze on him.

"Has there been anything else so diligently sought as the secret of overcoming gravitation? Generations of philosophers have labored at nothing else. Our scientists do nothing but experiment. Yet, we are as far from discovering a means now as we were in the beginning of our labors."

Eustace stroked his forehead to stimulate a sleeping memory.

"Before I went into the long sleep, I have a dim recollection that I discovered that secret."

The little man smiled skeptically.

"If you have preserved it, you have conferred upon the race such a boon as none other that ever lived has done."

Hope mastered unbelief. He caught Eustace by the sleeve.

"Do you remember?" he shrilled.

"Memory is hazy. Flashes of recollection come, but so many amazing events have occurred since I awoke, that I am confused. I must arrange my thoughts."

The dwarf sighed.

"You shall have time," he replied, preparing to descend. "Thinking is our sole occupation. We labor little. The mushroom fields furnishing our sole food require no attention. We do not attempt public works, because there is no need for them, as our numbers steadily are diminishing, we think—and steel our souls against the final hour of disaster, when the sun shall become dark."

They descended to the level of the mighty machinery, noiselessly continuing its gigantic labor.

"This work never ceases," their guide explained. "During the day, which now averages seventeen and three-quarter hours, due to the slackening of the earth's pace, the condensers gather in the sun's light. During the long night, the product is given further treatment until it becomes of the fluid consistency you note in the river."

They had paused at the mouth of the staircase well and he pointed downward to where the strange stream swirled in a glow of phosphorescent radiance.

"The discoverers of the process made the fatal error of draining their first supply from the earth's saturated interior, because earth energy possesses added fertilizing power and, in early days, when our numbers were greater, the food problem was acute. Unfortunately, they did not realize that the earth would claim this back. When the reason for the excessive loss was learned, the sun had grown so cold it required all this machinery to obtain even the small amount of light we now are able to extract. The steady drain upon the supply continues. Ultimately, the earth would claim all, were we not able to replenish the River each day."

"What is your power?" Brown asked.

"Light. It may seem suicidal to consume the vital force in that way, but we have nothing else. Other fuel supplies were exhausted before the Great Catastrophe. For centuries, the race had been dependent upon hydroelectric power and sun heat. A surprisingly small quantity of light suffices to drive these massive machines, thanks to constant improvement in design."

He paused and a slow smile broke over his somber face.

"I have been derelict in courtesy in not introducing myself. Here, however, all are known to each other, we are so few in numbers. I am called Har."

The professor introduced himself and his companion.

"The custom of surnames became obsolete generations ago. We have no need for them."

"Why have your numbers decreased?"

"Intermarriage, inadequate food and the confined, inactive lives we lead. Children are few and are wel-

comed with rejoicing by all the people. The child is king among us. Yet, with all the care we lavish on them, the infantile death rate is lamentably high, while the birth rate declines. Should the sun be slow in going out, there may be no humans to mourn the world's death."

His face grew dark with thought.

"Possibly, it is best we should pass thus. Merciful Providence may be sparing man the final, dreadful battle for existence on a doomed planet."

Depressed by his somber words, they followed silently down the winding staircase.

The City of Har

"THAT is the city of my people."

Har indicated a collection of stone houses extending over a considerable area. They had paused a moment, after a brisk walk from the Cave of the Light Condensers, at a gate leading through a high wall surrounding the strange municipality. A massive portal closed behind them.

"Here is the last civilized community of the race," he continued. "From excess of precaution, the forefathers surrounded it with this wall. Today, it needs no defense. A guard protects the city from the cannibal dwarfs. We have no other foes."

He indicated a well-shaped opening in the stone street, through which light streamed upward, breaking in a soft, diffusing glow on the cavern roof.

"The River illuminates and warms our caves. Through numerous channels beneath the city it reaches every home and is tapped by shafts from houses and streets."

He turned into a broad, deserted avenue.

"These buildings are empty. When the city was founded, all were needed. The number now vacant indicates how our population has decreased."

"Where are the present residents?" Brown asked.

"In the center of the community, where they gather for companionship. There are situated the few factories our needs demand. There also resides the Thinker, our leader."

News of their coming had gone before and the little people had gathered in a great central square to view the strange creatures who had so strangely entered their uneventful lives. None displayed either hostility or discourteous curiosity. The spirit of repression observable in Har was characteristic. All bore themselves as men and women over whom calamity had impended so long and so imminently that its menace had set an indelible seal on thought and character.

"I have not seen a single child," Eustace remarked.

"We protect them against every slight change of heat or cold," Har explained. "Our vitality is at its lowest ebb during infancy."

He paused before a massive structure facing a square.

"They are reared there, under the care of persons trained from youth to that vocation."

The slow, sad smile again wreathed his face.

"They are priests and priestesses of the race. Among us, only the Thinker is accorded more respect and he is merely the highest among them."

The dwarfs fell back courteously as they crossed the square. Brown observed all were attired in a double garment of close-woven texture, the women distinguishable only by the profusion of their hair.

"Mushrooms supply material for our cloth," their guide explained. "Patient selection of types resulted in a plant furnishing a good fiber. These matters are commonplace with us," he smiled, "and it is hard to realize you come from an age so remote that they interest you."

They entered a larger structure, Har informing them, over his shoulder, that it was "built by men as tall as yourselves thousands of years ago." Through the broad hallway they advanced to a spacious chamber, now occupied by a silent, attentive crowd. The beautiful girl named Mir was standing at the farther end of the apartment near a stone dais. She smiled at Eustace, then averted her eyes. A man above the common height of the people arose from a stately chair as Har addressed him.

"Oh, Thinker, these are strangers, who claim to be representatives of our race, as it was before the Great Catastrophe."

The man on the dais bowed, although his face mirrored amazement and unbelief.

"Do you claim to be survivors of that terrible event?" he inquired.

Professor Brown replied.

"We are aware of the circumstance to which you refer only through conversation with our guide. It's all very unreal to both of us. All I can say is that we went to sleep in the year 1938 and awakened today."

A murmur ran through the assembly and a scowling, black-browed dwarf thrust himself forward.

"His story is absurd. We are not children to be tricked by such flimsy lies."

"That is Rab, son of the preceding Thinker," Har whispered. "He loves Mir, daughter of our present leader, and aspires to succeed him."

The man on the dais studied the newcomers thoughtfully.

"Strangers, we are an honest people. Liars are unknown among us."

He paused, as though to allow time for the significance of his words to penetrate. When he resumed, it was in a tone of dignified appeal.

"If there are others of your kind in the caves whence you came, we will welcome them with joy."

Brown replied with equal sincerity.

"There are no others. I have stated nothing but the truth, although the truth is almost too amazing for credence."

"Astounding!" the Thinker exclaimed.

He motioned for his chair to be dragged to the edge of the dais and directed them to be seated on the edge of the platform. The professor told the story of their incredible experiences.

"What is this mysterious gas which produced such prolonged slumber?"

He addressed Brown, but Eustace answered.

"I discovered it during experiments to solve the problem of overcoming gravitation."

A melancholy smile lighted the Thinker's face.

"Was emigration to another planet considered even in your day?"

"Far from it," Maynard laughed. "The world was too pleasant to tempt men to undertake such a useless journey. My experiments were wholly from a love of scientific research."

"We pursue the study for other and more pressing reasons. We have thought, for ages, of nothing except escape from earth."

He sighed.

"The first failure and the last meet here."

"He is not sure he failed!" Har exclaimed.

Faint hope shone in the Thinker's face.

"It is not possible," he cried, "that the problem we have studied in vain was solved and the solution forgotten 20,000 years ago."

He leaned eagerly toward Eustace.

Did you achieve any measure of success?"

"I think I did but, as I told Har, my memory is confused. Yet, I have a faint recollection I did solve the problem."

The Thinker sprang to his feet, his eyes alight with enthusiasm.

"If you have done this thing and can recall your process," he cried, "you will have become man's greatest benefactor.

The Thinker Tells a Story

"THIS, I presume, is a vegetable product?"

The professor indicated, with lively distaste, a thin and watery dish before him. Mir had served them in another apartment at the conclusion of the audience. The Thinker smiled grimly.

"It is our only food supply and, of course, it is a vegetable product. We have no animals and, if we had them, I do not think we could bring ourselves to kill them. Where there is so little life of any kind, we could not take it, even to live."

Eustace, who had forced himself to eat sparingly of the unpalatable viands, thrust his plate away laughingly.

"I may grow to like it," he said. "However, it must be seasoned well with the sauce of hunger."

"Habit is a wonderful thing," the Thinker smiled. "When our people first entered the caverns, the summer sun gave sufficient heat to produce meagre surface crops. They raised sheep, swine and other animals. Later, however, when it became so cold and the snow blanket never melted, they sealed the caverns and were compelled to depend upon the mushroom-like growths they had developed."

"How did they happen to find these great caves?"

"In the beginning, they were not so great. Generations enlarged them—but, perhaps you would like to hear the story of the last days of man on earth?"

Brown nodded gravely.

"It would be interesting, I am sure, especially to Eustace and me."

"The world was awakened one morning by terrific shocks, accompanied by destructive winds. The sun was hidden by clouds. At least, so people then accounted the twilight that spread over the earth. Cities were shaken down and multitudes perished in the ruins. In New York, millions were swept to death by tidal waves hurled out of the deep by some awesome power. Hurricanes of terrible violence followed, leveling trees, smiting buildings and wrecking the works of man and nature. The record of those days would seem to you like the ravings of a madman."

"Was that the beginning of what you know as the Great Catastrophe?" Brown inquired.

The Thinker nodded.

"It's all puzzling to me," the professor confessed. "Science in our day—you understand I refer to the period when Eustace and I went into our long sleep—did not consider even the remote possibility of such a terrible disaster."

"Had you never speculated on the contingency that the earth might some day grow cold?"

"Indeed, we had. I wrote an essay on the subject myself, but it was merely an academic consideration of a remote possibility."

The Thinker regarded him oddly.

"There was a man of your name—Brown—who first advanced the theory that the solar system might become involved with a wandering nebula, composed of ice or something else capable of absorbing much of the sun's energy, with resulting reduction of the earth's temperature to the point of catastrophe. Did you ever hear of him?"

"Yes," the Covard pedagogue replied, a horrified expression on his face. "I remember the theory you mention and also who advanced it. I was that man."

Astonishment, mingled with awe, was expressed in the Thinker's voice.

"Impossible!"

"It is true! My article was ridiculed, at the time, as a fantastic contribution to the pseudo-science of the period. Yet, I felt there was a certain plausibility for the hypothesis."

"There was more than plausibility," the Thinker answered. "In fact, that is precisely what happened to the solar system. To me, far removed from the actual occurrence of the disaster, the amazing fact is that your appallingly logical warning did not arouse astronomers and other scientists to the imminence of the danger when the strange nebula first made its appearance."

"Was there, then, warning of danger?"

"I would not say warning was entirely lacking. Of course, I have only the authority of the meagre histories penned by our first leaders and the oral traditions handed down from generation to generation of Thinkers. There may have been more of warning than I am aware, but the people, happy, prosperous and accustomed to a diet of sensationalism in popular science as in their chronicle of daily doings, proved heedless. This much is certain, however, either they were stubbornly indifferent to warnings or the danger was underestimated by scientists of the period."

"It was an age of comfort, luxury and happiness," Eustace sighed. "Even if they had been advised of disaster, I question whether the scientists of the period could have convinced earth's easy-living millions that a terrible fate impended over them. They had an almost fatalistic confidence in the continuation of natural things in their seemingly foreordained and orderly way."

The Thinker agreed.

"In any event," he continued, "civilization suffered a disaster so complete that all social regulative agencies were annihilated. Nations reverted to primitivism, forgetting everything except food and personal security."

"Horrible!" murmured Brown. "In my wildest imagining, I never pictured anything like that."

"Famine followed and brutal wars for bread. Myriads poured from the wrecked cities to ravage the countryside or to perish miserably of hunger and privation. All ties of civilization, even of blood, were sundered. The earth was peopled by perishing Ishmaels, who had no thought but the desire for self-preservation."

"How did any survive?" exclaimed Eustace.

"One man maintained his poise. He was a scientist and realized the cause of the disaster. With his family and followers, he fled to what then was known as the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky. To the number of several thousand, they found refuge there, provisioning themselves as best they could and blocking the entrance while waiting for the turmoil to subside."

"What a frightful experience!"

The Thinker nodded and continued.

"WHEN they emerged, earth was a mocking resemblance of her former beauteous self. The day had increased to sixteen hours and ever since gradually has been lengthening, but the sun's rays had diminished to such an extent that it was almost dark.

Emigration to the tropics was impossible, as earthquakes had flung up new barriers or seas had flowed over former fruitful areas. Dispirited, their scouts returned to the cave and the little colony began life as you now see it existing. Later on, to meet their needs, the caves were linked together and extended, our people retreating into deeper caverns as the cold on the surface grew more intense."

"These are not the original caves?" Brown asked.

"No. Some we discovered. Others were hewed out with great labor. The work progressed more rapidly after discovery of the process for condensing light. That gave us the River and also a source of power. From the first, our energies were directed to the discovery of some means of overcoming gravitation, in the hope we could leave this dying world and establish ourselves on another and more kindly planet."

"Who are the dwarfs we first met?"

"I know as little of their origin as you. They broke through the rocky wall of our caverns early in the history of our occupation. How their ancestors survived the Great Catastrophe, we do not know. Neither do they. They speak another language and are brutal, degraded cannibals. Their numbers, at first, were limited, but they have grown more numerous, seeming to prosper on the mushroom food raised in their own caverns, to which we early diverted the River of Light. From their caves, the stream returns to a great central pool, whence it is elevated and started anew on its course. Alternately, they prey on our crops and on our people and beg our assistance."

"Why don't you kill them off?" asked the professor.

The Thinker's face expressed horrified repugnance.

"Kill humans? That is one degree of infamy to which we have not been forced to descend. At times, as when they kidnapped Mir, we must teach them to respect our rights and lives, but our people shrink from even such forays."

Har entered and announced that a company of soldiers was waiting to escort Eustace and Brown to the cave from which they had emerged into this new, strange, somber world. They followed the River of Light to the spot where they had encountered the cannibals and, after a little difficulty, found the path they had traveled. The Thinker accompanied them to the experimental cavern, displaying intense interest in all its furnishings and, particularly in the massive receptacle Maynard had designed, ages previously, to launch into space. He expressed disappointment at its size.

"It would carry only a few persons," be observed.

"I had not intended sending any one in it," Eustace explained. "My thought was that it might put us in communication with the inhabitants of another world. These books explain matters of primary interest in the life of our times and are written in several languages and also in geometric code."

"Your chemicals, I see, have been destroyed. What if your memory of the compounds also had vanished?"

"My recollection is not of the best," the young man confessed.

The Thinker sighed.

"We must wait. At least, we have a new hope, to which we have been strangers for centuries."

Maynard had been idly turning the pages of a book he had taken from the iron cylinder. The writing was clear. The mysterious gas that had caused him to slumber so long had also preserved the volume. A sentence caught his eye. He read it again. With a cry, he thrust the book into the Thinker's hand.

"Read'" he exclaimed. "It is the lost formula!"

The professor leaned over to scan the writing

"It is all there," Eustace continued. "I set it down so people on other spheres could send the shell back, if they could understand what I had written and possessed sufficient knowledge to compound the chemicals."

"Do you mean the secret of overcoming gravitation?" the Thinker demanded.

"Yes. If we can find the necessary chemicals, there is no reason why we should not be able to abandon this dying world and emigrate to another."

The Planet Hope

THE precious records were transported to the city of the little people. The Thinker, unable to restrain his joy, preceded them to spread the news. Men and women pressed forward to kiss the books. Surrounded by the elated mob, the volumes were borne to the huge laboratory building, black-browed Rab being hustled out of the large central apartment he had occupied as chief of the research division.

"What does this mean?" he demanded angrily.

"A method has been found to overcome gravitation. These books preserve the secret."

"Impossible."

Rab's tone was bitterly contemptuous. He turned furiously upon Eustace.

"Curses on you, charlatan! You are misleading these unfortunates and will leave them in deeper despair when your falsehoods are exposed."

He strode from the apartment.

"There is something behind his antagonism," Eustace remarked, when he and the professor were alone.

"I think so, myself," Brown replied, drily. "Her name is Mir."

"Why Mir?"

"Why anything or anybody else? Two men and a woman have been sufficient to make endless complications ever since the world began."

The Thinker re-entered the apartment, checking the indignant reply that trembled on Maynard's tongue.

"Come with me to the astronomical laboratory, if you are not too weary. It is some distance, but I wish to show you the planet to which we intend to migrate if your plans are—are feasible."

En route, they passed two smaller cities, also surrounded by strong walls. Both were deserted.

"Generations ago, both were populated," the Thinker explained. "We then had hundreds where we now have one."

At one of the cities they rested a short time and the professor fished in his coat pocket for pipe and tobacco. Intent upon his thoughts, he filled the bowl mechanically, leaned against the side of a stone house and puffed industriously.

"That, I presume," their guide remarked, "is the act the ancients called 'smoking.'"

"Heavens!" Brown exclaimed. "Have you no tobacco?"

"We know of it only by tradition. The forefathers made desperate efforts to grow the weed, but were unsuccessful."

"Now, I know we have reached a desperate crisis in human affairs."

In comic dismay, the Covard instructor smothered the embers as they arose and carefully caulked them with a bit of mushroom to prevent loss of the unconsumed contents.

"I hope this new planet of yours has something that will serve for tobacco," he smiled. "In the meantime, I intend to practice conservation."

The path they followed steadily ascended. The River of Light ever was at one side, pouring in a

luminous tide toward the pool at which the Thinker had spoken. Eustace paused abruptly.

"What would happen," he asked, "if the machinery for raising the River ceased operating?"

"In a few days, we should be plunged in darkness," the Thinker replied. "Then, crushing, deadly cold would settle over our caverns. Unless we repaired the machinery promptly, we should freeze."

He turned into a narrower cave, leading off at right angles from the one they had been traveling. A tiny stream of light flowed through it, affording dim illumination. They came to a rock door. A dank chill greeted them as they passed it and entered a small chamber.

"We must dress warmly here," their guide explained, selecting garments from stone pegs on the wall. "These will be small for you, but will suffice for the short time we shall be in the observatory."

Eustace and the professor struggled into the clothing, drawing hoods provided with goggles over their heads and protecting their hands with thick gloves. The Thinker opened a door. A cold light shone through the opening. He closed it. They were conscious immediately of the intense cold of the room.

"This light seems to come from the moon," the professor remarked, "but, I presume it is sunlight."

The Thinker nodded and led the way to a huge steel structure. With practiced hands, he manipulated a large mirror.

"Here is our telescope. This is the bottom of what you knew as Lake Michigan. When it froze solid, the fathers thawed a tunnel through the ice to the surface and inset a huge lens, which had been ground in Chicago shortly before the Great Catastrophe. The world died, but the product of the skilled old craftsmen survived."

In the mirror they perceived a startling picture of greenery. Immense trees towered into the sky, clouds floated over riotously verdant valleys, rivers glinted and a half-gale rocked the herbage.

"You are gazing upon Hope, the planet we hope to make our home, if departure is possible from this dying earth. Young and generous, it has everything needed to make our people happy, contented and prosperous."

"Where is it?" Brown demanded.

"It is one of several planets revolving around a sun we call Providence. It was not known to your generation. After the Great Catastrophe, we believe many changes occurred in the heavens. Thousands of years ago, Providence and its planets appeared in our field of vision. We watched it and them, generation after generation, millenium after millenium, as they drew nearer earth. Thanks to the clarity of earth's atmosphere, it is possible now to study Hope and to observe even such details as you have noted."

"If that beautiful planet is so close to earth," argued Brown, "why is it not cold and lifeless like our own? Or, conversely, if we are so near the sun of Providence, why shouldn't earth be equally warm and fertile?"

"It is not nearly so close as you imagine perhaps," smiled the Thinker. "This lens and accessories, which amplifies light by means of a bank of vacuum tubes, and through which you are looking, is so much greater than any your age possessed, that you have no means of comparison by which to estimate its power. It was the only one of its type ever moulded. The work was concluded on the eve of the Great Catastrophe by a newly discovered process. Great hopes for new discoveries through its use were entertained by scientists of that age."

He smiled in melancholy recollection.

"They did not have the remotest conception of the strange setting in which it eventually would find a resting place."

"I can readily understand that," commented the professor, feelingly.

"Again, you must remember there are practically no atmospheric handicaps to observation now. All moisture was precipitated long since. Because of the almost unchanging temperature on all parts of earth, winds are unknown and the air is practically motionless. Nor must you overlook the fact, of course, that our position deep in the earth, where not a ray of sunlight penetrates, affords obvious advantages."

He swung his arms vigorously, exhaling his breath in a cloud of vapor.

"This discussion is invigorating mentally," he smiled, "but it does not mitigate the temperature of the observatory. Continuing with my answer to your question, however, it is certain tremendous celestial changes occurred simultaneously with the diminishment of the sun's power. It chanced that, by the time this lens had been found and mounted, there was not an astronomer living who had survived the Great Catastrophe. In their methodical effort to prevent total obliteration of the culture and science of their age, those early-day cave dwellers set down painstakingly all they knew that would be beneficial to posterity. However, theirs was a natural tendency to conserve knowledge, which, in the light of their own experience, would be most in demand by, and would prove most beneficial to, the future."

"I can readily understand their viewpoint," Eustace conceded, vigorously massaging a tingling ear.

"If you find the chill too pronounced, we can adjourn elsewhere," the Thinker suggested, but the others negatived the suggestion.

"Thus it happened," he continued, "that by the time the lens was mounted, we had lamentably little information regarding your astronomical observations and no celestial maps at all. However, there always has been a belief among our scientists that the Great Catastrophe was of far vaster extent than terrestrial survivors understood and resulted in tremendous celestial changes. The planet, Hope came within the range of our observation as soon as the giant telescope was completed. Perhaps it was born of the disaster that overwhelmed our sun. There has been much speculation on that point. In any event, century after century, our solar system traveled toward the system dominated by the sun of Providence and Hope came closer to earth. At one time, we entertained a wild dream that, eventually, earth would swing close enough to Providence to make its surface habitable once more. This hope died centuries ago. Our solar system now seems to be circling that central sun at an unchanging distance."

They walked rapidly up and down the chamber to restore circulation, but they were too engrossed in his narrative to accept his repeated suggestion that they leave the observatory.

"Of course, Hope is remote. We are not adept in such calculations, but the fact that it is warmed and vivified by Providence, whereas we experience the effect of that sun's rays little, if at all, is proof of its distance from us. It is this circumstance, more than any other, which has proved discouraging. Even if we could discover means of leaving earth, we cannot perceive how it could be possible to propel vehicles so far or to guide them through the ether to a safe landing."

"I don't think that obstacle is insurmountable,"

Eustace declared. "Of course, we shall send a trial messenger through space to ascertain our probable chances of success, but mere distance or the pull of our own sun or of other planets would not daunt me, if we could launch our projectile toward Hope when it and earth are in proper relationship to each other."

"Your confidence is inspiring," declared the Thinker.

He twirled the mirror. Abruptly, he stopped it.

"Look!"

A LIVING creature crept across the mirror. It had four legs and two arms, the latter set grotesquely on either side of a huge, gorilla-like head. The skull was small and long hair covered the body like a thatch.

"The fact this creature lives, we consider proof of an atmosphere," he explained. "It breathes. We have noted, during winter on Hope, that clouds of vapor comes from its mouth or nostrils. Apparently, therefore, it is warm-blooded. From the contour of its body, particularly the moderate lung cavity, we deduce that the density of the air must be similar, at least, to that of earth. We cling to the belief that, as Hope has streams and rain, the gaseous composition of its atmosphere must be comparable with our own and that we could therefore make it habitable for us."

The pictured beast, in impish fancy, had grasped and placed to its mouth or nose a piece of greenery. The filmy vegetable expanded like a balloon. Larger and larger it grew. As it burst, the creature raced out of sight into a thicket of dense underbrush, obviously for protection.

"You must agree with me that the creature breathes," their guide exclaimed. "Where it lives, we may hope to survive. In any event, it is better to risk death than to wait that certainty here. On the earth there is no more hope."

They returned to the main cavern, depressed by the contrast between the riotous verdure on Hope and the rocky darkness of their barren caves, yet encouraged by the fact that so beauteous a planet was within the visual scope of the great telescope. Brown and the Thinker paused at the children's hospital, which Brown wished to visit, but Eustace continued on to the laboratory.

As he entered, he heard a man's voice raised in anger and a woman's in entreaty."

"You love him!" the masculine speaker asserted.

"You have no ground for such a statement," the other replied. "I have not given you cause to make it and neither has he."

"Are there no men of your own people who can please you? Why listen to the lies of this giant charlatan?"

The woman did not reply. With quickening pulse, Eustace had recognized the man's voice. The speaker was Rab.

"Better you should die than disgrace our people," the man screamed.

Eustace heard a cry of fear as he raced into the room. Rab had grasped Mir and was carrying her, struggling, toward an open conduit boring down through solid rock to the River of Light. He hurled the man aside and caught the girl in his arms. Scrambling to his feet the savage sprang for Maynard held Mir close to his breast as he sank on a bench.

She was very beautiful and his heart beat wildly as he supported her. Abruptly, she drew away, knelt at his feet and, for the second time, carried his hand to her lips. Before he could protest, she was gone.

A New Hope

MAYNARD'S experiments continued unceasingly, day and night. He had pressed into service all the technicians of this strange underworld. Troops of miners went out into distant caverns and tapped ore deposits unworked for milleniums to bring in the raw materials he desired. The little men were feverishly interested and indefatigably busy. Life to them, previously hopeless, had become dazzlingly brightened by a new hope. They haunted the neighborhood of the laboratory, snatching up every crumb of information from the workrooms. Professor Brown became, for Eustace, the official herald of events outside.

"Trouble is afoot," the former declared one evening.

"That so?" Maynard asked abstractedly, his mind on an important experiment. "What's the matter?"

"Rab has left the city and joined the cannibals."

Eustace whistled. This was news, indeed.

"What's his idea? What does the Thinker know about his purposes?"

Brown shrugged his shoulders.

"No one can say, but there is a shrewd suspicion he intends mischief. The guard at the outer cavern has been doubled and scouts have been stationed near the cannibal caves."

"Mir—what does she think?"

"I don't know," the professor laughed. "Personally, I'm of the opinion he will try to steal our secret formulas?"

"That all?" Eustace's tone was indifferent. "If he wants them, I'll give them to him. They are duplicated many times. Should he steal one set, we have a dozen more."

"He may try to do, at the end end of this strange world, what we are seeking to do here."

"I hope he does. Those little beasts are far down in the scale of humanity, but they are men and women, after all. If Rab can manufacture vehicles and chemicals, to take those cannibals to another sphere, he will lift a load from my shoulders. I have been wondering what we should do with them, when we were ready to leave."

"You intend transporting them to Hope?" Brown asked, in amazement.

"What else? Would you leave anything living on this dying planet? I wouldn't. Even Rex and Queen are going with us. I didn't know how we could entice the cannibals into our cars, but I intend to try. If Rab can handle the matter, so much the better."

"Don't you realize they would introduce a disturbing element into your new Eden?" the Covard instructor asked, half jestingly, half in earnest.

"Professor, neither you nor I nor any one else can know whether we shall survive in that new world. Those cannibals might live, where we could not. I wouldn't chance the wiping out of the human race because of distaste for them."

Brown nodded, a curious smile on his face.

"Association with these people has produced odd changes in both of us. Do you know, I had come prepared to plead for the cannibals? Somehow, the doctrine of the survival of the fittest does not seem so plausible when one faces the possibility that the entire race may be exterminated."

"Frankly, if I were certain we were the fittest to survive on Hope, I would have fewer compunctions. But I'm not sure."

"Neither am I," Brown replied soberly. "I hope Rab succeeds in transporting them there."

Maynard's experiments were progressing rapidly and

satisfactorily. To his delight, the formulas were working out in accordance with his calculations, penned thousands of years previously. As a final test, he again placed Rex under the influence of the gases to ascertain whether they possessed the power of suspending animation. Every nerve tense, he gazed through the crystal sides of the experimental chamber, saw the dog sink slowly to the floor and then slip into peaceful slumber while the Thinker, Mir, Har and other of the dwarfs watched with breathless attention.

"Is he dead?" the girl whispered.

"I think not," he replied, in a low tone. "Heavens knows, for our own future, as well as that of Rex, I hope not."

"Will the outcome of this test determine success or failure?"

"Yes, for the moment, at least. If it is successful, I shall know I have properly reconstructed the chemical agents that serve to overcome the force of gravitation. Should the experiment fail, I shall have to conduct many more to ascertain where I have erred."

"Even then, you would not abandon hope?"

"No. I know it was accomplished once. I am positive it can be done again."

The Thinker breathed a gusty sigh of relief.

"I am happy to hear you say that. Would you like to see the place we have constructed, from which to send the shell on its fateful journey?"

IN a small cavern adjoining the cave where the giant condensers worked unceasingly, the dwarfs, by infinite labor, a prodigious expenditure of light-energy and at great danger from the terrible cold, had excavated an opening through the solid rock to the surface of the earth.

"As soon as we have finished the big doors to close the opening, we will send men outside to clear away the snow," the Thinker explained. "For several weeks, during which you have been conducting your final experiments, volunteers have been accustoming themselves to the low temperatures of the astronomical observatory and, later, of a small cavern separated by only a thin rock wall from the surface. You see the hoist for the shell is nearly finished. When you are ready, we will raise the vehicle to the surface and shunt it out on the ground. We shall conclude our work in ample time."

Eager to make the fateful test, Maynard hastened to the laboratory. Rushing into his work chamber, he collided with Rab, fleeing with an arm load of manuscripts. Mir was lying on the floor. The dwarf darted toward an open shaft leading down to the River of Light, obviously intending to throw his burden into the stream. Eustace tore the volumes from him and flung him against the wall. He fell to the floor, limp. With a cry, the young man knelt beside Mir and raised her in his arms.

"Mir!" he cried.

Her eyes were closed. As he drew her to him, her hair brushed his face. He rained kisses on her still lips. Rab, bruised and unsteady, crawled to the pile of books. Sweeping them up, he fled. Mir's eyes opened in terror.

"Is he gone?" she exclaimed.

"The coward!" Eustace replied, hotly. "I feared, for a moment, that he had seriously injured you."

She glanced shyly into his face.

"I came in to see you and found him stealing the records."

"He could have them all, dear, rather than frighten you like this." He kissed her passionately and her arms fluttered around his neck.

"I wonder whether you can really love one like me," she smiled. "I am so ignorant of the things that interested the women of your time—fashions and sports, clothes and society. Why, Eustace, we have even forgotten how to play and history tells us your age played in its every waking hour, at business, games and the strange thing you called politics."

"I have forgotten that any other world ever existed.

"Your life and mine are two hundred centuries apart."

"Our love shall bridge the centuries."

She crept close within his arms.

"After all, love is everything," she whispered. "Everything else is transitory, but love will make us happy even in this sad old world."

The Test Trip

THE experiment with Rex proved brilliantly successful. After a brief period of slumber, the noble animal awakened as strong as before. The loss of the books stolen by Rab did not trouble Eustace. All information in them was duplicated many times. Maynard really was grateful for the theft, because it gave the black-browed one sufficient data for duplication of his own experiments, if he could induce the cannibals to find and mine raw materials for chemicals and shells. Transportation of the first exploration vehicle to the little cavern taxed his ingenuity, but finally it was placed on the hoist and raised to the upper level for its jaunt into space. At the last moment, a controversy arose.

"How can we be sure," the Thinker asked, "that it will land on Hope?"

"We cannot be sure," Eustace admitted, "although by sending it on its way when the planet is in juxtaposition with relation to earth, we have every reason to believe it will go straight to its intended destination."

"What if it is influenced by another planet—our Sun or Providence?"

"It would hurtle toward the one exercising the controlling power."

The Thinker's brow wrinkled in thought.

"Is there no way to control it, even if some one were inside?"

"Yes. The act of leaving earth would not exhaust the chemicals. There is sufficient to check its descent when it reaches Hope and also to overcome gravitational forces of other planets tending to swerve it from its course, but it would be necessary that some one utilize the chemicals intelligently."

"We cannot risk failure," the Thinker declared. "I shall go with the shell."

"Impossible! We cannot rob this people of its leader."

"I have aided Eustace in his labors," Har interjected. "It is best I should go."

"The things he has taught you, I can learn," the Thinker declared.

"I know more of these agencies than either of you," Eustace declared. I will make the trip."

As a compromise, Brown offered himself but, far from solving the problem, his tender complicated it.

"We shall draw lots," the Thinker decided. "Eustace, you are barred by virtue of your knowledge of these matters. One of us three shall go."

At the conclusion of the drawing, Har triumphantly held aloft a tiny, fateful shred of mushroom fiber.

"I have won!" he declared.

"I, also, shall go," his wife said.

"May two be carried?" the Thinker asked, after a pause.

"Yes," Eustace replied. "It will transport them, with all their provisions and supplies."

As he spoke, he bowed gravely to the devoted woman.

"Then, Har and his wife shall be the first Americans on Hope."

Provisions, water, weapons and other equipment for the long journey and also for the landing on Hope were stored in the shell. The entire colony gathered to witness its rise to the cavern, from which it was to be shunted to earth's surface. Har and his wife exchanged last farewells. The door of the vehicle clanged and he drove into place the massive inner bolts securing it. The projectile rose, passed through the double doors and disappeared.

"It has passed the outer doors," the Thinker said, in a low voice.

A pause.

"It has arrived on the platform, which will shunt it off on the ground."

A longer pause.

"It is now off the platform."

His voice was solemn, yet tinged with an indefinable confidence.

"We have bidden a last farewell to Har and his devoted wife. God grant we shall be reunited with them on Hope."

He turned commandingly to the professor and Eustace.

"Let us go to the observatory."

Scarcely able to contain themselves while donning heavy protective garments, they burst into the chamber. Eustace, in the lead, seized the mirror and whirled it.

"Look!" he cried.

The Thinker and Brown crowded on either side. In the center of the glistening mirror was the projectile! Spellbound, they watched it shoot straight toward Hope.

"It will arrive," the Thinker declared solemnly. "We must possess our souls with patience during the long period until success is certain, but I am confident, in my heart, that Har and his wife will be the first Americans to land on the destined future home of the race."

In endless relays, scientists of this strange world trooped to the observatory, remaining to the limit of endurance within its chill confines and giving way to others, as eager to follow the projectiles on its fateful flight. Eustace had time for only occasional visits and these at long intervals. Confident now that Rab would succeed in devising means to transport the cannibal dwarfs to Hope, he limited the manufacture of projectiles to a number sufficient for the accommodation of the Thinker's people. Even so, the fabrication of these and the preparation of chemicals, preservation of food and other labors incident to the projected exodus taxed all available man-power.

Brown was the courier uniting his office with the observers in the astronomical laboratory. From him, Eustace learned that the shell was hurtling at incredible and, seemingly, increasing speed toward Hope. At night, it was impossible to discern it amid the glooming mass of the planet. It was then that wild rumors of failure arose to run, like a black cloud of despondency, through the tense-nerved community until throngs of distracted people flocked to Maynard's factory, where they gained new confidence by observing his purposeful activity.

MIR was a constant visitor, coming on light foot and frequently surprising Eustace as he glanced up in preoccupation from deep calculations or after minute study of a new piece of test metal. There was a great understanding between them. He would continue his work while she sat quietly beside him, until he had concluded. Sometimes she would slip away on some mission of her own, when he became absorbed in his labors. But, there were other times when he fled from his tasks, to sit with her for long hours. She would listen with insatiable patience as he sketched his problems or detailed the progress of his work, or would sit with him in silence while he rested body and mind in her loved presence, happy to have her with him and preparing for new and greater efforts.

It was understood that they were to be married as soon as possible, but he desired first to know whether Har had failed or succeeded. If Har failed, he had determined to be the next pioneer voyager into space, for he was supremely confident of his ability to bridge the gap between earth and Hope. But, he had sternly resolved to make the journey alone. On the other hand, if Har was successful, all bars to marriage, interposed by his own iron will, would disappear. Then, he and his bride would launch on the strangest honeymoon the race had ever known, a journey over the uncharted lanes of interstellar space to a home on another planet.

After what seemed an interminable period, word came to him that the shell was nearing its goal. Accompanied by Brown and the Thinker, he spent the last fateful hours before the observatory mirror, indifferent to the deadly chill of the somber chamber. The shell had become a blur on the broad expanse of Hope's verdant surface. They experienced the greatest difficulty in following it. However, constant checking of its position satisfied them that its speed had been retarded as it neared its objective and they were confident that Har was intelligently utilizing the chemicals to check its rapid descent.

Fortune favored them at the last. It entered the atmosphere of Hope in daylight, seeming to float for minutes above a broad, open space close to a gigantic river. They could not follow its flight to the ground, because the riotous vegetation on the planet cloaked it. However, after a time, they perceived a thick mass of smoke spiraling upward through the towering trees—the signal Har had agreed to send after his arrival, if atmospheric conditions were such as to permit him to venture outside the shell.

"Of course, the fire might have been produced by contact of vegetation with the exterior of the shell," Brown observed soberly. "It is reasonable to assume a body passing through Hope's atmosphere at such speed would become very hot!"

"Personally, I do not believe, from my observation of the shell's progress to its final landing," Eustace replied, "that it traveled fast enough to generate much frictional heat."

"We shall know more tomorrow," the Thinker replied. "Night rains are frequent on Hope and will extinguish the fire, however started. If there is smoke again tomorrow, at about the same point, we shall know the fire was set by Har."

The succeeding night was the longest and most torturesome of the entire vigil. Dawn on Hope found the three in the observatory, attention glued on the magic mirror, while a hush of suspense and expectancy settled on the city of the dwarfs. Impatience grew to agonizing proportions as the hours passed without recurrence of the fateful signal. Abruptly, a drove of the strange beasts they had previously observed lumbered from the underbrush in the vicinity of the spot where the shell had fallen. Two fell and did not move again.

"That explains Har's delay!" cried Eustace.

"What do you mean?" the Thinker demanded, infected by the other's excitement.

We are witnessing the conclusion of the first battle between earth man and the beasts of Hope! Evidently, they were attracted by curiosity to the shell and Har has driven them off, killing two of them. While they were in the vicinity, he dared not venture out to light the signal beacon."

"I believe you're right," ejaculated Brown. "Look!"

A column of smoke rose through the underbrush and drifted lazily above the trees.

"It is Har's signal!" cried the Thinker. "He has won through! Gravitation has been overcome and we shall found a new world of man on Hope!"

Final Preparations

THE bonds of restraint, which had bound the dwarfs for centuries, were broken. They, that never had known joy or hope, grew drunk with happiness and pride of achievement. With a gigantic labor ahead, they viewed the goal as immediately won. Preparations of the numerous projectiles necessary to transport them to Hope was viewed as a mere matter of detail. Eustace was hailed as the greatest man of all ages. His marriage to Mir was the occasion for protracted and unusual merrymaking.

"We are products of two worlds, sweetheart," she said, kissing him, "and we stand on the threshold of a third. Never was there a marriage like ours."

"I have no fears for the future," he replied. "We shall evade the disaster that has threatened our ill-fated people for millenniums."

The wedding was signalized by an intensification of preparation for the great migration. From their mines the little men brought forth immense added quantities of ore, which they treated with light as power and fluxing agent. The projectiles constructed were larger than those in which Har and his wife had ventured into the unknown. The cavern from which the astral pioneers had taken their departure was enlarged, the hoist strengthened and the doors replaced by others permitting the passage of the greater vehicles. For the first time in their history, the little people were prodigal in expenditure of their most precious possession—light. Confident the hour of deliverance was at hand, they employed it unsparingly.

"This is the occasion we have awaited for centuries," the Thinker smiled. We are staking our all on its success."

"We shall win through to Hope," Maynard replied.

His confidence inspired them. There was no thought of failure. Immense stocks of the precious chemicals were manufactured and sealed in everlasting rock, in order that there might be no recurrence of the disaster that had plunged him and Brown into their century-long sleep. He grew worn at toil but found labor sweet, for Mir was ever at his side, lightening his titanic task by her presence. From the cannibal caverns came strange stories of great activity in other mines, indicating that the debased ones were engaged in a work similar to that engrossing the attention of the Americans.

"Rab is making good use of the stolen books," Brown observed. He has even made those savages understand what we intend to do."

"I am glad he has," Maynard replied. "As he has all my secret formulas, further responsibility for saving his wretched crew rests on his shoulders."

"Can they manufacture chemicals sufficient for their transportation?"

"Why not? The raw materials seem plentiful. Rab is an educated man, though he is misguided. He, and they, should reach Hope."

"What if they do?"

"Why trouble the future? Our present problem is big enough, certainly."

The day on which the last shell was completed was one of merrymaking and feasting. In the midst of the celebration, a scout raced through the streets.

"The cannibals are out!" he gasped. "Rab intends to steal our shells."

"Shall we stay and fight?" asked Brown.

"Why delay?" Eustace asked. "We are ready. Let us leave at once."

The little people hastened to the chamber where the shells were stored. Each family had been assigned a projectile. They disappeared into the vehicles like rabbits racing into a warren.

One by one, the shells rose on the new hoist, passed through the double doors and were shunted out on the earth. The last and largest moved smoothly to its place on the lifting mechanism. Eustace held up his hand for silence.

"I can hear the shouts of cannibals. Hurry!"

He assisted Mir into the Shell, which also accommodated the professor, the Thinker and the Thinker's wife. As he stepped inside, he paused to cast a final glance about the cavern.

"Come, Rex! Come, Queen!"

The dogs reluctantly entered the projectile. A dwarf dashed in the cave and paused uncertainly. It was Rab.

"Farewell!" cried Eustace.

"We shall meet again!" Rab replied, shaking his clenched fist.

Eustace bolted the entrance as the projectile arose. Glancing down, he saw the black-browed one impotently menacing the shell. Then, the heavy steel doors closed, they were on the shunting platform, slowly sliding to solid earth. The other machines had departed. They were alone on the surface of the dying planet.

"Good-bye, earth," Maynard said, with a catch in his voice.

He pressed a button and the shell leaped upward. Through a window, he caught a fleeting glimpse of the shunting platform, man's last creative work on earth's surface. Then, he turned his eyes upward to the vast void above.

There, clear and brilliant, the star of Hope seemed to beckon to a new and kindlier life.

THE END.

The Other Side of the Moon

By Edmond Hamilton

(*Continued from page 555*)

land's hand driving us back through the moon and across the gulf to earth at the moment of his own and the moon-world's death.

"Howland——" Carson was breaking the silence at last, speaking his thought. "We did find him, didn't we?—but we lost him in the end."

"Not lost, Carson," I told him. "Howland went the way he desired to go—for the world."

"Had I known what he intended——" Carson began, and then could say no more.

"We could not know," said Trent. "We could not know that Howland meant to annihilate the moon-creatures forever with their own great mechanism, and to die with them doing so. But now that he has done it, we know—and the world will know, and remember."

Silent again, we gazed out toward that shining moon-disk. And in that silence, as our minds traveled out across the great gulf toward the colossal, airless city in which the millions of the turtle-creatures had met the death which they themselves had given eons ago to another race, Trent's words seemed echoing again about us. The world would know, and remember—yes. It would know, and would remember, how Howland alone it had been who had stricken down those turtle-creatures' millions even as they had gathered to pour down to the doom of earth. It would know, and would never forget, what a mighty debt it owed to the man who had saved it, and who lay dead now.

THE END.

Your Viewpoint

A Long and Interesting Letter Which Tells Its Own Story

Editor, AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY:

I have just finished the Spring number, which I enjoyed very much. The new cover which you have used on the last two Quarterlies is a great improvement. It is colorful without being quite so garish as of old and accordingly much more tasteful.

It seems that your change of management has not made much of a change in the quality of your stories. But in time there is bound to be a change, as competition makes for improvement in quality.

Stanton A. Coblentz is a master of satire as proved by his last effort, "After 12,000 Years." At times it hurt one's racial pride of achievement. It is, however, a literary masterpiece in this field, being even better than that so excellent Atlantis story, "The Sunken World," one of the best so far evolved. This new story of the future, with all justice, could be followed by a sequel describing the remnant of mankind staging an uphill fight against the insects.

For a possible plot, I make the following suggestion: As mankind was about to succumb to the winged onslaught, adventurers from out of space, perhaps from Venus, landed and learning the plight of mankind, to whom they were related in a sense, and seeing the possibility of utilizing for their own overcrowded peoples a portion of the land to be reclaimed, made an alliance with them, waged an eventually successful fight, freed earth from her hordes of insects, and helped to repeople the nearly denuded globe with several million friendly immigrants.

It is a possible plot which I would follow out myself if I had the requisite literary ability, as well as time. However, being only a college sophomore, I won't attempt it.

As to Edmond Hamilton's story, "Locked Worlds," it set forth an unusual theory of interlocked atoms which was startling in its revolutionary aspects, but seems reasonable enough, providing one thing can be answered so as to untangle a snarl in my mental thread.

As I understand it, his theory is as follows: First, he begins with an atom of our world composed of a nucleus, positively charged, around which revolve negatively charged particles known as electrons; second, he considers an atom in the other world composed of the same nucleus, but other electrons, revolving about it in the opposite direction; third, the atom of our world is not necessarily of the same element as it is in the interlocked world; fourth, all atoms of one world are locked with corresponding atoms of the other.

Then, if one were to move an atom in our world, its corresponding atom in the other world would be moved a corresponding distance instead of remaining fixed, or the nucleus, of necessity, would be in two places at the same time, or one of the atoms would cease to have a nucleus, in which case it would cease to exist. Suppose we allow that if one atom moves, its interlocked atom must move also. Then, if we take, as an example, an object such as rock in this world and find that a part of the atoms composing it are interlocked with atoms forming a tree in the other world, and the remainder form a cow leaning up against it, we would find that, if the cow were to move, the rock would fly apart or *vice-versa*, if the rock were moved, both the cow and tree would be moved correspondingly as if they were one object.

This is untenable, as are the other possibilities. So it is, interesting as the theory seems, it must be abandoned. (I seem to have answered my own question; however, I may have made a mistake in reasoning and, if so, would like to learn your opinion on the subject.) Other than this, his story is very good. Let's have another by him real soon.

Aladra Septama's "The Cry From the Ether" is a worthy sequel to "The Beast-Men of Ceres" and calls for another. The ending was a bit abrupt, telling little about the Elementals. However, a description of them could be amplified in a succeeding story. An opening was left for more to follow.

Quien Sabe—"who knows," as the Spanish say, a clever name for a *nom de plume*, and it might be more than fiction. It might have a fact basis. In fact, "The City of Eric" calls to mind tales that have come from Brazil, telling of Indians from the jungles when taken to a large city, such as Rio de Janeiro, for the first time who showed no surprise, but talked of towers and cities of great size deep in the jungle. These towers were topped by what must have been a crystal of some type, which gleamed bright by night and day. But no white man has ever seen them. At least none has ever returned who has seen them.

The "Utopia" was a trifle idealistic, but quite plausible. The trouble with Utopias, in general, is that no writer has set forth a really practical way in which such a state of affairs may be achieved.

From what was said, one infers a sequel may be expected in the future. While speaking of sequels, whatever became of A. Merritt's sequel to "The Face in the Abyss"? You promised it to us nearly two years ago. I saw some criticism of it, it did not seem overwhelming enough to prevent your publishing the sequel. That was a wonderful tale. I read it once before in another publication and three times since you published it. "The People of the Pit" was excellent and the same is true of "The Moon Pool," which for no *good* reason was slammed by a few. Another story to which I'd like a sequel is "The Master Ants" by Flagg. Can't you take us to Mars and John Carter again with Edgar Rice Burroughs as director of the trip? Where has Ray Cummings disappeared to, that he hasn't been heard from for a long time?

Dr. David H. Keller is one of your best. How about another story from him? Don't pay too much attention to all the adverse criticism on "The Menace." It was good, and one should realize that a story does not necessarily set forth one's ideas on a certain subject mentioned, in this case racial prejudice.

Two of the best stories you have ever published are "Green Splotches" and "The Color Out of Space." For that matter, I have thoroughly enjoyed every issue I have read. At times I have been a little disappointed in some stories, but then, you can't please everyone all of the time.

Only improvements that I can see necessary are more illustrations and a larger magazine.

Hoping that this long effusion is not too long, I wish "our" magazine the utmost success.

C. Richard Short,
119 N. 5th St., Albambra, Calif.

Some Notes on Our Illustrations and Authors

Editor, AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY:

I received the Summer issue of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY some few days ago and noticed a number of changes in matter and make-up that I wish to comment on. The cover was (in my opinion) very good. But upon examining the inside illustrations I was very greatly disappointed.

So much for brick-bats. Your new arrangement for the Table of Contents pleases me much more than the old.

Concerning the stories, I have not read them all but will comment on those that I have read. "White Collars" by Dr. Keller was the best that he has written. Contrary to general opinion, I personally do not care for Keller's stories.

Give us more stories by Edmond Hamilton. His stories are by far the most interesting that you have ever published. I will admit overstressed coincidence and a touch of melodrama—and even that they are a little short in science, but they add a touch of real interest, that is often good to taste, after reading more scientific but less gripping authors.

Miles J. Breuer is another of my favorites, and I always welcome a story by him.

By the way, is the author of "The Talking Brain" still living? If so, you should certainly make an effort to obtain more stories by him. The story named is, to my mind, the best that has ever been published in your magazine, QUARTERLY and ANNUAL included.

Burris Cunningham,
Springer, New Mexico.

(*Continued on page 575*)

Editorials from Our Readers

THIS being your publication, you, the reader, have certain ideas, not only about this publication, but about scientifiction as well. The editors believe that their mission is complete when they select and edit stories that go into the making of this magazine. On the other hand, they feel that you, the reader, have a more detached view of the magazine itself, and that very often your ideas as to the magazine, and as to scientifiction in general, are not only valuable, but are original and instructive as well. For that reason it has been decided to print the best letter—about 500 words—which can be used as an editorial, on the editorial page and to award a prize of $50.00 for any letter so printed.

The letters which do not win the Quarterly prize, but which still have merit, will be printed in the "Editorials from Our Readers" Department, newly created in this magazine.

Laudatory letters containing flattering remarks about the stories themselves, or of the magazine, are not acceptable for the editorial page. We want inspiring or educational letters, embodying material which can be used as an editorial along scientifiction themes.

Remember, it is the idea that counts. A great literary effort is not necessary, as the editors reserve the right to edit all letters received in order to make them more presentable for publication.

Remember, too, that anyone can enter this contest, and everyone has an equal chance to get on the editorial page of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY hereafter.

This contest will continue until further notice. Contest for each issue closes the 20th of the second month preceding date of issue—viz.—contest closing date for the next issue is the 20th of November.

The Coming Age of Science

WHAT does it signify that today the peoples of civilized countries read scientifiction, outdo each other in scientific achievement, believe less in vague superstition, and promote education? Why is there the present trend toward freedom of women, the non-romantic list, mass-education, and standardization of life? Why do people suppress their emotional natures, and promulgate practicability? What can it portend that psychology and physiology thrive amazingly and increasingly, that specialization is the rule? What can it mean that wits outclass brawn, that life as a whole is safer and more comfortable? There is but one answer to all this. The cause and effect, beginning and end, reason and result is SCIENCE! The 18th century awoke to a new code, a new way. Experiment succeeded and ousted abstract speculation. Astounding discovery after discovery rocked the thinking world. Invention by invention and fact by fact the imperishable stairway of science added step after step and today is well on its way upward. And one of the greatest advances was the introduction of scientifiction. When people leave the classical novel, the jaded life-story, and abundant literary trash for a moment to absorb the truth and inspiration of scientifiction, the goal is near.

And the future? The inhabitants of this speck in the vast cosmos shall rise and progress till they will one day explore the heavens in more than sight, and shall escape the bondage of perpetual existence on a single planet. The strides of today are the commonplace incidents of tomorrow. Who shall say, now we have the airplane, that there is no advancement possible in ways of travel? Who shall say that now Einstein has probed the depths of mathematics with his relativity theory, there is no field of that science left to explore? Who shall say that now every source of energy-supply has been tapped or estimated, the available energy is limited? Who shall say that now we have seen a group of stars 10 million light years away, we have reached the limits of the universe? Who shall say that with the discovery of radio-waves, there are no regions of ether-waves left to utilize? Science has demonstrated in breath-taking rapidity that there are no limits to anything. Did the generation which marvelled at the telephone dream of radio? Did the balloonists of former times picture to themselves a heavier-than-air machine? Did the early chemists, having discovered and proved the existence of the invisible atom, have nerve to predict further division?

Salt, common sodium chloride, is a crystalline, white substance, of a characteristic taste. The ancients used it and to them it was merely an indispensable food. The chemist looks at it today and sees in his mind's eye a host of compounds, either derived from it or related to it: hydrochloric acid, poison war-gas, a violently-active metal, a caustic, alkali, bleaching powder, aspirin, soap, paper, and dyes.

The savage looked up into the night sky and saw little points of light too remote and changeless to necessitate speculation. Today the astronomer and amateur investigator turn an eager tube up at the fires and see suns like our own, nebulæ, dark stars, meteors, comets, and the other planets. He finds that in common with every measureable star in the visible universe, this little earth of ours has such well-known substances as iron, aluminum, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, etc. The learned man of yesteryear spent the better part of his life accumulating knowledge of his fellowmen by traveling all over the globe. Today the scholar learns the same and more without moving, through the agency of books and teachers.

Julius Cæsar, greatest of all Roman emperors, moved heaven and earth to make his name feared throughout the world. Madame Curie, a demure woman, scientist of France, created a much greater furor by her simple announcement of the discovery of a substance a million times more radioactive than uranium, and *later* placed it among the elements.

Newton thought out in a comparatively short period of time what the philosophical discussions of Plato, Aristotle, and the rest of that school hadn't accomplished in *centuries* of continuance. Kekulé, in a fit of speculation, laid the basis of the structural formulas of many organic compounds, but it took a nation of slaves a lifetime to erect an absolutely worthless mound of stones in the middle of the desert.

And thus we might go on forever, showing what a little real thinking and well-placed work will and does do. Shall we call this the Age of Science? No! For that is *yet to come!* People are still shaking off the nightmare of the Dark, Dark Ages, and our seeming progress is merely a groping step, a faltering beginning. One has but to read a scientifiction tale to see where the imagination has advanced. And *where imagination leads, fact follows!* Scientifiction is not a product of the "golden age of science" it is an inevitable growth of the human mind!

Ah! Welcome indeed will be the day when eager explorers return with fantastic tales of the far-distant planets, of life on Mars or Venus, of the astounding events in mid-space. Welcome the day when man's egotistical belief in the earth's importance will be shattered, when narrow-minded conservatism will be confronted by indisputable fact, when we shall shake hands, or somehow greet, the inhabitants of a sister planet. Then shall *begin* the Age of Science!

Otto Binder,
3648 N. Luna Avenue
Chicago, Illinois.

Beyond Scientifiction

THE interested student of scientifiction will find among the lesser known works of Edgar Allan Poe much to hold his attention. In particular, even one casual reading of his story "Mellonta Tauta," first published less than a century ago, will bring out clearly the point I want to make about scientific stories in general.

In that story Poe made an attempt to picture the world in the year 2848. I have no doubt that the story was considered extravagant nonsense when it first appeared. Today, when we are still about 919 years short of 2848, the reader of "Mellonta Tauta" is amused, and perhaps a bit thoughtful too, when he sees how pitifully far short it falls of the realities and the commonplaces of 1929. Poe's character, pictured as living nine hundred years from now, laments the fact that balloons, subject to the uncertainties of the wind, are still the only means of aerial navigation. The most rapid way in which two of his characters can communicate with each other is through the mails, delivered by balloon.

When Poe wrote the story, he put his characters a thousand years into the future. Less than one-tenth of those years have actually passed, and civilization and science have far surpassed his wildest dreams. We have such wonders as radio, television, and the talking movies; dirigibles and great planes; artificial silk, painless surgery, transatlantic telephones, pasteurized milk, helium gas, T. N. T. and T. N. X., shatterproof glass, fingerprint identification, and thousands of other things so common that we forget to marvel at them.

In less than a hundred years, science has progressed so far that Poe's story seems ludicrous. *We have gone far, far beyond his scientifiction.*

One of H. G. Wells' best imaginative novels is "When the Sleeper Wakes," written more than a score of years ago. It is a marvelous picture of a complex civilization two hundred years from now. It contains a prediction of television. But to the 1929 reader, the illusion of the story is spoiled when he comes to Wells' impractical, undeveloped airplanes. The story was written when airplanes were in the earliest experimental stage. Perhaps it was considered a daring conception of aviation in the future. But now, within Mr. Wells' own lifetime, aviation has progressed so far that the story, in that respect at least, is obsolete. *We have gone far beyond his scientifiction.*

We do not always realize so clearly that science and civilization are increasing at an *accelerating* speed. The sum total of scientific knowledge increases like money at a high rate of compound interest. It expands in a geometric progression, not an arithmetric progression. It gains momentum as it goes.

A writer who could truly claim to be able to draw an approximately close picture of life, say, three hundred years in the future, would have to possess indeed unusual qualifications. He should be a competent engineer in order to foreshadow the aviation and other means of future transportation, with such things as the cheap oil-burning Diesel engine and the rocket-cars and planes already on the horizon. As an engineer also he must think of the possibilities of greater cities to house the increased population, and of great irrigation projects to reclaim more land to feed them. Or else synthetic foods must be produced. The thousands of new machines and devices that will come can be foreshadowed only by a man with unusual mechanical and electrical abilities.

But also he should be a medical man in order to tell us how diseases will be wiped out as smallpox has been stamped down in the past. A physician could best tell us of new disorders that will arise as a result of our high-speed civilization. In the field of medicine and surgery the developments of the next three hundred years will be breath-taking. Already the miracle of adrenalin is an established fact.

And he should be a chemist. We have only scratched the surface of creative chemistry. He should be an astronomer and a geologist. He should have a knowledge of every science.

He should be a psychologist, in order to foresee the effects of the future civilization, the tendency toward specialization, the emancipation of women, and numerous other influences, upon the individual. He could tell us of the change that will come in moral standards, in ideas and ideals.

Above all, he should have an imagination that would dare to go beyond fact. Without that, all his other qualifications are useless.

Yet, suppose one man to be so qualified. Let him write a description of life three hundred years in the future. The chances are that in thirty years the world would far surpass his scientifiction.

Probably there is no one man so perfectly qualified. Yet the scientifiction fan, as he reads imaginative stories by dozens of writers, forms gradually in his mind, whether he realizes it or not, a composite picture of the years to come *that is perhaps more accurate than we can know.* Competent doctors have written scientific tales that give us a view of the future from the standpoint of the medical profession. Engineers have shown us the mechanical and electrical marvels that may come. The astronomical story looks up to the heavens; the geological story down to the mysteries of the earth. Psychologists have shown us the inner workings of the human brain and heart.

Scientific stories induce thought. The reader's mind accepts certain ideas and speculations; rejects others. Each reader is shown the future as seen through the eyes of many men, whose qualifications to predict are varied and supplementary. And so we can penetrate beyond the curtain that hides the future and capture a fleeting glimpse of that which is still to be.

But we shall never draw aside that curtain. As the years roll by, science will progress beyond our wildest dreams. Inventions and discoveries will be made that are not considered possible now. Science will always, sooner or later, go beyond scientifiction.

But scientifiction is making more and more people realize the impetus it lends to future achievement.

Charles Cloukey,
313 North Maple Avenue,
Lansdowne, Penna.

Science and the Impossible

FREQUENTLY one hears the statement made that a certain thing is "Impossible." What is meant is, that it is beyond the scope of human achievement, yet contrary to the truth of such a statement, we use thousands of mechanical and scientific appliances today, which were the "Impossibilities" of a generation ago.

With the advances in scientific discovery which have given us the radio and television, the conquest of the air, three-dimensional talking pictures in color, and the possibility, as one Englishman has put it, of having "Smellies," also, an intelligent man will be very reticent in predicting the impossibility of any imagined achievement.

If impossible things do exist, it would seem that they belong to a class, of which man is not able to think logically. Whatever we are able to grasp with the mind, may be produced in the material world. Man cannot think of that which does not exist, or cannot be brought into existence. Let the thinker try to visualize anything non-existent. His thoughts will always be pictures of real things, or combinations of these things. He cannot think beyond the things that are.

When the imagination of someone constructs an interplanetary ship which enables him to traverse with the speed of light the far reaches of space, he is thinking of something that may be combined from existing things, assembled according to scientific facts, and propelled by existing forces. The pathway through the stars lies there, waiting for the bold pioneer who first discovers the means of following it. Through inconceivable ages the giant suns have been following their ordered pathway through space, about each revolves its family of planets, about the planets their satellites, about the satellites their subsatellites—here are space-ships of a truly majestic order! Inanimate space-ships directed by the Infinite Intelligence. Shall *man*, an *intelligent* creature, be thwarted in his dreams of following the pathway of the stars?

The scientific age in which we live is continually revealing the falsity of any statement of impossibility. To those be the glory, who, content to be called fools, will yet continue to dare that which man has never attempted before, not once, but over and over again, till victory rests upon the banner of the adventurist. Nor should one stop at laughter. The wise ones of the age laughed at Galileo when he said the earth moved round the sun—they made him recant his words, but to an intimate friend he remarked afterward: "She moves, just the same!"

They laughed at Robert Fulton, with his strange, unwieldly craft upon the Hudson, but when the stately Palisades began to slip past, they shouted, "She moves! She moves!" They laughed at the first crude locomotive, but she moved! They laughed at Morse sitting at the first primitive keyboard, and while they laughed, over the singing wires sped the message; "What Hath God Wrought!" Rather it should have been, "See What MAN Hath Wrought!" Fools have laughed in every age, while men of imagination and vision have wrought the wonders of today. The laughing wise ones watched while the Wright Brothers prepared for their initial flight. The ignorant poet paraphrased their failure in, "Elias Green, and his flying machine," but the machine flew!

Undaunted, unafraid, undiscouraged, the great minded men of science and imagination go on—one by one the impossible things swing over to the side of accomplished facts. Few people dare laugh today at anything which men may attempt. The laughers have been fooled too often lately, have become the objects of laughter themselves. They prefer to wait till the thing is done and then say: "I had the same idea myself, but just hadn't gotten around to it!"

The great adventure of life is the adventure into the unknown. Columbus went adventuring westward. The pioneer went questing into the untracked forests, across the plains, over the mountains, and when he could no longer go by earth-paths he took to the air, West, East, North, and South, wherever the unknown is, man has answered the call.

From over the rim of the world at twilight, rises the queen of the night. Already in imagination men have walked upon its scarred and pitted surface, revelled in its unexplored mysteries, marvelled at its possibilities as the home of an ancient, vanished race! As we look upon its softly gleaming face, what man-creature cannot escape the attraction of its lure, and long to go there too! Rocket, or space-ship, or what? That insistent, alluring calling will find an answer! And after that—those paths to the far-flung stars! To our sister planets, and to possible mighty civilizations more ancient than our own! To the pioneer-scientist, whose vision and imagination knows no impossibility, the untraversed paths of infinite space are calling, calling—calling—and let no one say that man shall not find a way.

Rev. Robert F. Haskin,
Zumbrota, Minnesota.

Vision

VISION, which is the mental picturing of things that might be or of the things which may come to pass, is the greatest attribute of man. Man's power of projecting his imaginings without regard for accepted facts, theories, or superstitions into the realms of infinite time and space is a God-given gift.

Vision is the greatest and most inspiring effort of men to think beyond the limitations of their actual experiences. Vision and imagination are the sign posts of the intellect.

Vision is the great distinguishing characteristic of the human race. Animals have courage, love, loyalty and memory, and some have industry, skill and perseverance. Man, however, dominates the earth through his ability to visualize what he might accomplish should he pursue certain causes of action. He alone has the kind of mind which may pierce the fog of the future. Animals may wish and want, but man alone can dream.

The visions of men—before their realization—have figured largely in fiction. Men dreamed and wrote of flying as the birds centuries before such flight became possible, yet the dream was there. It is in this one realm, fiction, that the imagination may run unfettered, and it has thus been ever the field for the pens of those who have looked ahead. There are many living today who avidly read Jules Verne's great romance, "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," and who scoffed at the possibility of such an achievement. Yet he planted the germ of a great idea and his visions have been vindicated.

Fiction is ever the trail blazer of Fact. Herein lies the great value of scientific fiction. It stimulates the minds of men. It puts them into a receptive mood for the implanting of new and original ideas. It leaves the intellect of countless people open to the possibilities of present and of future scientific progress. It makes them more tolerant of the world's dreamers and scientists. It is a great worker for world peace, as it pictures the terrible possibilities of scientific warface. Summing it

all up, scientific fiction is the great enlightener—the great educator. It points the way for humanity; it shows science as the great savior and liberator of man.

It will be through the invigorating influence of fiction that man will accomplish his first great step in the conquest of the Universe—namely, interplanetary research, communication and exploration. Much has been and is being written on this great theme and it now remains for man to unite his wealth, science, courage and ingenuity towards the realization of this great dream. And we cannot doubt for a moment that fact will follow fiction again and that the grand visions of men as interpreted by their fiction will lead them on to yet greater accomplishments.

Robert L. Farnsworth,
626 Pleasant Avenue,
Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

The Instrument of Destiny

IN the past, specialization has meant—death. Ever since the first amoeba essayed permanency of form, and succeeded, Nature has been more than pitiless. She has urged on each striving race, then struck in the hour of attainment. Yet in cruelty she has been kind, for her purpose is one of trial and error. Race after race has been tried, race after race discarded. The dinosaurs, the titanotheres, the mastodons, even the manatee and bison of today, where are they? In her great experiment, whose purpose is the formation of a race that will of itself rise above her tests and traps, she has cast them aside as failures, and tried anew. Is Man the creation that shall surpass the creator, the child to whose care and control an aging Mother may safely trust the knowledge and understanding of her universes? Or will Man fail?

Nature has been kinder to Man than to most races, for he has in him the power to succeed more firmly installed than ever before. Perhaps he is Nature's last hope on this planet. For ages he has been tried, and has won. Now comes the last, the supreme test, the one that shall mark his fate indelibly. He has proven himself equal to Nature. Can he rise higher? *And if he can, will he?*

It would seem that with Scientifiction lies the answer. By means of his developing brain and its weapon, science, Man has advanced through the centuries, conquering the universe, and Nature, step by step. Knowledge immeasurable he has stored in his brain, his supremely specialized organ, and he will store more, until all the facts of the universes are within his grasp. But, will that be all? Will he, must he stop there?

Who shall be the Man of the future; the puny, bloated brain-sac, mechanically controlling his worlds with machinery upon which he is absolutely dependent, sucking up fact upon fact eternally, merely remembering; or the conqueror, forcing his machines to bring his conquered universes to his feet in submission, striding from sun to sun, from galaxy to galaxy, like a veritable god, knowing, understanding, *and imagining?* One or the other Man must be, unless he take the backward trail—to the beast. With the first lies failure, with the second, success. Man must choose, and abide by his choice!

How shall Man attain success, imagination? What weapon, what tool has he that can give to an entire race the power to look far beyond the known until sight fails, then to see farther still with the eye of the mind? How shall he set an ever-flaming, ever-receding beacon just beyond the limit of his comprehension, forcing him to follow, to struggle, to employ all of his great fact-knowledge as a torch with which to pierce the darkness and a chain to ever link probability with possibility? Man's mind must stretch and struggle with great, half-formed ideas that lie just beyond his reach, or else become a mere reservoir, a mental cesspool where facts lie festering in disuse. What thing of Man's creation can do this service to Nature and the Race, and what in particular can compel Science to raise its head and gaze out past the darkened horizon? There is literature, the record of the soul of the Race, and of literature there is Scientifiction! That which can make the ignorant seek knowledge, the intelligent find understanding, and the genius open his mind to vision; that which can make plain the known, and more than hint at the unknown—*the Instrument of Destiny!*

P. S. Miller,
302 South Ten Broeck Street,
Scotia, New York.

The Importance of Romance

"He that observeth the wind
shall not sow;
And he that regardeth the
clouds shall not reap."

WE wish to declare, editorially, that these lines, quoted from the mournful dirge of Ecclesiastes, are deceitful and false.

They were written by a man who, at the pinnacle of worldly success, had spent all his time getting a kick out of the pleasures of his world—fame, honor, wealth beyond his needs—and had concluded that all of them were, in the end, only vanity and vexation of spirit. The only advice he had to give was, take your youthful pleasures before they turn to dust, marry a good wife, work hard, put money in the bank, raise a brood of children to follow your example, and go down to your long home with a sigh of relief.

We believe this man suffered from a very common ailment—lack of romance in his soul. He was only half-alive, as most people today are half alive, who measure the purpose and joy of life in terms of "fighting the game," country estates, and automobiles. The time came for him, as it comes for all such, when life was no longer worth while, but was the vanity of vanities.

In this common workaday world the most common things hold deepest mystery; hold greatest possibilities for romance; hold greatest significance for the future. If people do not learn to see the romance of things; if they find everything beginning to pall on them—then they should not blame the world for it, but should recognize the fault to be only in themselves. We must recognize the absolute necessity for *romance.*

It is a pity that the world of people today seek romance only in sentimental songs and stories. It is a pity that war with its perverted opportunities for romantic heroism draws whole populations blindly into wickedness and destruction. It is a pity that only by strong love or strong hate can our "practical" people be made to use their imagination and find romance in life. It is a pity they cannot pause and quietly "observe the wind" once in a while. The poet, the artist, the scientist, all know the art of doing this, and their lives are worth living; they are envied by the rest of us, who only think, "If *I* were in *his place,*" and fail to see that external circumstances are *not essential* to sharing in the romance of living.

We believe that scientifiction satisfies this fierce necessity for romance. Of course, the readers know that the stories cannot be all true science. They know that tales of people traveling to the other planets are not the records of actual explorers. But for that matter they must admit that the strange pictures of atoms drawn for us by scientists are not and never can be actual pictures of those atoms, though they are more or less accurate and reliable. And as you, after considering the amazing things about atoms thus depicted, can never again take an ordinary stone in your hand without pausing to contemplate its complex nature, so we submit, you cannot, after reading scientific stories about Mars, ever again look up at the red planet without feeling a breath of romance stir within you. For no longer is it simply a dull red pinpoint set in the sky with a host of others, to appear only after the working-day is gone; it is a world which man will certainly explore in the future—unless his uncultivated and explosive craving for romance is allowed to find only perverted expression in degenerate pursuits and in war, and thus sweep him quickly to self-destruction.

W. P. Rawlinson,
The Rice Institute,
Houston, Texas.

Nature and Life

ASTRONOMY! The most ancient and greatest of the sciences. What are we in comparison with the vast limitless expanse of space which envelops us, its blazing suns, planets and nebulae? Our obscure solar system is but a few grains in a sea of infinity.

Man's great achievements, what are they compared with nature's glorious presentation of the immensity of a universe—its formation, development, and death? The life of a world is but a passing moment in eternity. To finite minds this is all incomprehensible.

What is life? A chemical phenomenon? Or merely the peculiarities of a substance having movement, development and thought? We cannot help but think of the purpose of life itself. We live, we grow and we die, by nature's universal law. To what end is our cycle of life? Are we the playthings of some mental giant? We are as much of the earth as is the soil itself. As all chemicals have their properties or characteristics, so have we. Ours is the ability to move, to develop, to change and adapt ourselves to the conditions.

Looking into the orbs of the heavens, we can hardly deny that somewhere in those cosmic formations there is intelligence. We would assume that these beings are like us in structure and appearance, for man thinks in terms of similarity to himself. What nature has produced we can hardly venture to guess at. Whether plant-intelligence, or forms in another dimension, are possibilities we cannot determine. Environment, we know, is one of the principal factors in evolution, for life adapts itself according to the conditions to which it is exposed. Hence, life, like ours, on other celestial bodies would hardly be plausible.

What is the origin of life? Science presents through hypotheses (1) by a Creator. Are we the creation of one who guides our destinies? One who watches and gives us a faith, who leads us to light? (2) A chemical phenomenon? Was life begun by a chance combination of certain elements, an alloy, or a compound? Our body is purely chemical—the entire system is controlled by chemical activity. (3) By transference. Is there an existence of germ plasm in the ether which develops when placed under favorable conditions? (4) There is a fourth, a more romantic—the possibility of space travelers, planting the germs for development, when some calamity occurred to their transports, and their death upon this planet which was yet in a semi-gaseous state.

These theories cause people to think, and

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